WAR TIME MEMORIES
OF
A MAN-CHILD

By Doyle Earl Bradford

FOR MY CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN

DOYLE EARL BRADFORD

PROLOGUE

For many years, your mother has asked me to put in writing for my children my recollection of my military experiences during World War II.

I have maintained all these years that the war was a part of my life that I chose to block out of my memory. The years of preparing for combat service were good years, but the few months that I spent flying over Germany was a terrifying time for me. Every day I would lose another friend or a fellow officer and it was a constant mental adjustment to accept these losses. This is why I chose to forget.

I do not recall any feeling of guilt for the bombing of German industry nor populated areas. After all, not a day went by that they did not give us reason to want to annihilate them. Neither did I feel any exhilaration, only a feeling of accomplishing tasks for which I was trained

I cannot begin to recall all of the details of my war experience, after all it has been 50 years since it began. However, I will try to put down the significant things I do remember. How I wish I had taken your mother's advice and began this when Bunin and Lucian were alive for they relived these experiences much more than I did.

CHAPTER ONE The Early Years

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A desire to fly began at an early age with me. Even though I was only five years old at the time and could barely read, I can remember the headlines in the Tulsa Tribune "Lindy Lands in Paris". I can remember a front page picture of him in a touring car getting the ticker tape parade in New York. I was fortunate enough to be introduced to Lindbergh by the editor of Flight Magazine, George Hadaway, at Cape Kennedy on the occasion of the 10th moon shot. George introduced him as "Slim".

I can remember in 1932 the Graf Zeppelin floating over my grade school playground and wondering how it would feel to be up there.

I can remember reading in the paper that the first DC3 would be landing in Tulsa and I rode my bike several miles to see it even though it would be dark when it arrived. I can still remember the beauty of it with the spotlights shining on its polished aluminum fuselage.

I can remember riding with the family from Tulsa to Oklahoma City on the old 66 Highway and seeing the rotating beacons used to guide the pilots flying the mail at night. They were located 10 miles apart.

I can remember picking up pop bottles and milk bottles to sell to get money to buy the old pulp books that glorified the World War I air war. I relived every minute of that war in my mind. I knew the Red Baron intimately before Snoopy knew him at all. How I wished now that I had saved those books - they would be classics.

Because I knew that there would be no opportunity for me to even get close to an airplane as a civilian, I began to think about the Army Air Corps. As I approached my 18th birthday, I began to lay the groundwork with mother and dad to get their permission to enlist.

The war was already on in Europe when I enlisted in the regular Army Air Corps on October 28, 1940 - one month and 17 days after my 18th birthday. It seems October would be a significant month in my military career. The morning of the 29th of October, seven recruits boarded a train for San Antonio at the Old Union Station in Tulsa, and it would be almost five years before I would return home as a civilian.

My first assignment was to Kelly Field in San Antonio (Buddy is now stationed there). Kelly at that time was an advanced flight training base at which the cadets flew BT8's The BT8 had a well earned name of the "Flying Coffin" because of the many fatal crashes. I do not recall much about the airplane, but spent many of my free hours on the flight line watching them take off and land.

At Kelly, they were not prepared to handle new recruits so they created a tent city to house us. There was a shortage of current military clothing so we were issued World War I uniforms. The blouse had a choker collar and black buttons. We were also issued what was called a campaign hat which was similar to the hats worn by the Oklahoma Highway Patrol. Fortunately, they received a shipment of the current uniforms before I got my first weekend pass. Had we worn that World War I uniform to town, we would have been laughed out of town by the other soldiers in San Antonio.

We only spent a few weeks at Kelly and we spent most of our time doing K.P., learning to do close order drill, and attending orientation lectures. Since there were no rifles available, we used mop handles as guns in our drills.

The only thing standing out in my mind about our time at Kelly was an attack of dysentery brought on by the unsanitary conditions under which we lived. There were probably a hundred recruits in the camp and we all were sick. Because we only had one tent latrine, a lot of the kids never made it to the bathroom.

My next station was Jefferson Barracks on the banks of the Mississippi in Missouri. J.B. as we knew it, was a small permanent garrison for the Infantry and was as ill equipped as was Kelly to handle recruits.

I can remember arriving late at night and leaving the train at J. B.'s own loading dock. We were marched to the supply warehouse where we were issued a folding cot, a mattress, a pillow, four sheets, two pillow cases and two blankets. The tent city in which we were to stay was several blocks from the warehouse and it took three trips in the cold December night to get everything to the tent. Our duffle bag and foot locker would be delivered to the quadrangle around which the tents were located so we would have to lug them a hundred yards at most.

I learned very early the next morning that this would be a miserable experience in my young life. We were domiciled in four man tents heated by a small conical shaped wood stove that did little to take the chill from the tent. The latrine was built of concrete blocks with no roof nor heat so there were no showers. We shaved and took our bath in our canteen cup, which we placed next to the tent stove to heat. God how I hated that.

The first morning at J.B. I was introduced to the bugle calls of the military.If you have never been awakened at 06:00 a.m. by reveille, you cannot understand how depressing it is. You had fifteen minutes to hit the cold floor (dirt), get into your fatigues, jacket and boots and get to your assigned area on the quadrangle for morning roll call. The roll call always seemed to go on forever. After reveille, you had 30 minutes to shave, bathe and make your bed then you were formed into squads and marched to the mess hall for breakfast.

At this station, there was no military training, only work. You would spend one day hauling coal to the mess hall, the headquarters building and the permanent barracks. Then the next day you would be on kitchen police duty, which began at four in the morning and ended at eight at night. The next day you did guard duty where you were on duty two hours and off for four hours.

Two incidents stand out in my mind about J.B. Both happened on guard duty. My first day on guard duty, I was assigned to inside guard at the base prison. Most of the prisoners were soldiers who had gone AWOL or were awaiting court martial or had been court martialed for theft or insubordination. However, there were some federal prisoners being held there until they could be transported to Leavenworth. I can tell you that an 18 year old kid armed with a night stick was pretty damn nervous in this cell block. Just after I began my 10:00 p.m. to midnight stint, I was walking the perimeter of one of the cell blocks when one of the inmates jumped out of the dark and grabbed the night stick away from me and I damned near had a heart attack. No more than a few seconds later he handed the stick back to me then laughed like hell. I found out later that he had been let out of his cell to go to the bathroom just before the other guard went off duty and the guard failed to tell me. I

am not too sure the whole thing was not set up just for my benefit, since the previous guard was a regular at that prison.

On another one of my guard duty tours, I was assigned to guard the military cemetery - for what reason I do not know. I guess they thought the bodies would walk away. During that day, I had developed a toothache and by the time I was relieved of my watch at midnight, the pain was almost unbearable, so I went to the hospital to get some relief. The night nurse said she would have to awaken the dentist unless I could survive on aspirin and I made the mistake of choosing the dentist. After he examined me, he said the tooth had to come out, but he would have to pull it without an anesthetic because all the drugs were locked up. After he pulled the tooth, I knew how the cowboys felt when the local barber pulled their teeth.

The only pleasant thing that happened to me at this miserable place was the visit from mother, dad and your aunt Mildred. It was just before Christmas and I was very homesick thinking about this being my first Christmas away from home. As it turned out, I would not be home for Christmas for four years. Anyway, they were able to visit me for a weekend and by using the motel shower, I was able to get my first bath in three weeks. Many times later in the war I would think about this and feel for those infantry men in the trenches with no
way to bathe.

TENT CITY BLUES OF
JEFFERSON BARRACKS
ANONYMOUS

I'm sitting here and thinking of the things I left behind,
And I hate to put on paper what is running through my mind.

We've hauled a million tons of coal and raked ten miles of ground,
A nearer place to hell is waiting to be found.

We've washed three-million dishes and peeled ten million spuds.
We've paid a hundred dollars for the washing of our duds.

The number of parades we've stood is very hard to tell,
We hope it is nice in heaven we know what it's like in hell.

We've eaten heels of dough-bread and cans of half baked beans,
We've stood a million guard mounts and cleaned all camp latrines.

We've marched a million miles or more yet never left the post,
We've studied till the dawning hours for education most.

When final taps are sounded and life's cares are laid away,
We'll do our final big parade up the Golden Stairs on judgment day.

The Angels will welcome all of us and then harps will start to play
We'll draw a host of canteen checks and spend them all that day.

It's there we'll hear St. Peter greet us suddenly with a yell.

"Come in you boys from Jefferson Barracks,
You've served your hitch in hell

CHAPTER TWO Army Air Corps

It was here after being in the Air Corps for one year, I got my first airplane ride...what a thrill

Just after the first of the year in 1941, I was transferred from that hell hole in St. Louis to Chanute Field in Rantoul, Illinois. Here, for the first time since entering the service, I would be staying in an enclosed building with modern plumbing. Until you have lived in a tent for two months in the winter, you cannot appreciate the luxury of an old clapboard barracks.

I would be spending the next 30 weeks either in a classroom, in the hanger working on airplanes or on the flight line learning to run up the engines, fueling, pre-flighting and securing the airplanes. There would be no kitchen police duty, guard duty, drills or parades. In other words, I would be learning a trade and not soldiering.

There are a lot of pleasant memories of Chanute Field. It was the first opportunity that I had to feel and touch the airplanes and because the airplanes were either prototypes or obsolete aircraft, I was able to see the evolution of the military airplane beginning in the early twenties. There was the P26, a small fabric covered fighter with a 30mm machine gun that fired through the prop. There was the Martin BIO that had tandem cockpits with fixed gear and external bomb racks. There was the B13, an airplane with pusher props with machine gun positions in the front of the engines nacelle and the gunners crawled through a tunnel in the wing to reach his position. There was the Curtis P36 which was a smaller version of what would be the Republic P47 used in World II. The P36 was the only airplane to use a shotgun starter. The pilot would place a 12 gauge shotgun shell loaded only with powder in a breech in the cockpit and fire it electrically. The burning powder dropped into a cylinder forcing a piston down which turned the engine.

I remember well when they brought in the P39 Cobra to turn over to the school. The P39 engine was behind the pilot and drove the prop with a drive shaft running between the pilots legs - similar to the drive shaft in a car. Because there was no oil running through the shaft, the airplane had a four bladed Curtis electric prop. When the instructor in the propeller class was explaining the operation of the prop, he mentioned that the prop cost the government $40,000.00, which to a $21.00 a month private was a hell of a lot of money.

This is probably as good a time as any to tell you how I lived on $21.00 a month. When I was paid each month, I donated $.25 to the old soldiers homes, which left $20.75. My first stop would be the PX where I would buy a $5.00 PX book, one carton of Camel cigarettes and three cartons of Bull Durham roll your own tobacco. This would leave me $14.00. Then I would go to the theater and buy a $3.00 book of tickets leaving me $11.00 for the rest of the month. You talk about poor, this was poor!

We all worked hard at the school and we played hard on the weekends. I remember one weekend we rode the bus to Peoria, bought a jug of Dago red wine and went to the strip mines to swim. There was a CCC camp where we were swimming and one of the CCC boys drowned while swimming with us. This sobered us up quickly and we helped recover the body.

One weekend, I rode into Chicago on the back of a motorcycle which belonged to a friend - what a miserable way to travel. We spent the night in a flop house which had little chicken wire

enclosures with a mattress on the floor and cost a quarter. A far cry from a Coachman Inn. We had planned to go to a baseball game but decided we would have more fun on the beach.

Sometime during my stay at Chanute Field, we had an outbreak of measles and several barracks were quarantined. They set up a separate mess for those quarantined so they could limit the exposure to others. After about a week, we decided that our barracks should be quarantined too, so we borrowed a sign from another barracks and put it on our door. Four in my barracks were from Oklahoma and the boy from Bartlesville had a car so we just loaded up and went home for a few days. We were never missed.

Time passed quickly at the school since we were busy during the day and studied in the evenings and were introduced to new things almost daily to keep our minds occupied.

I completed my studies at Chanute, in August of 1941 and was assigned as a mechanic to New Orleans Army Air Base. New Orleans Army Air Base was located just off Lake Front Airport on Lake Pontchartrian and our flight operations was located on the civilian airport. Our squadron had two airplanes, a BIB and a PT17, one temporary building for flight operations and line office, and one hanger.

It was here after being in the Air Corps for one year, I got my first airplane ride...what a thrill.

It was kind of a lazy life at this base since we only had the two airplanes to look after. We spent a lot of time fishing off the sea wall and shooting skeet out over the water. Of course, we had a lot of time to get into mischief in town and since I was now making $72.00 a month, I was rich. I remember Jack's Bar on Canal Street that had three bars. The front bar was the most expensive and the third bar in the rear was the cheapest. You could tell when it was approaching the end of the month - we would all be in the back bar. We did our thing on Bourbon Street too. The Court of the Two Sisters, which is still there, was one of my favorite places to eat.

Several of us were in town at a movie when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. An announcement was made over the public address system for all servicemen to return to their base. This was the last time that I visited New Orleans for many years.

After the war started, there was a great deal of speculation as to what would happen to us at New Orleans Air Base. Obviously, with a primary trainer and an obsolete bomber, we were not going to a combat zone any time soon. We did, however, start preparing for any eventuality. The first order of business was to get current physical exams. When I was examined the doctor decided that they needed to surgically remove a planters wart on my right foot since it might interfere with my efficiency sometime later. It was removed the next day and they sent me to the barracks on a pair of crutches.

By the middle of December, we received assignment orders to Muroc Dry Lakes in California - now called Edwards Air Force Base. The entire squadron was loaded on a troop train and would spend the next week getting to California. Because of my lack of mobility (they would not let me keep the crutches), I was assigned a state room. Since I could not go to the box car where they had set up a kitchen, my meals were brought to me by my bunkmate. Because of the private quarters, I had a blackjack game going all the way to California.

At Muroc, I found myself living in a tent again. Since Muroc is a desert, the days would be warm but the nights would be frigid. We did not have stoves so I ended up putting newspapers under my mattress to keep the chill from my back and slept in my fatigues.

Here they brought our squadron up to strength and assigned us five Hudson Bombers built by Lockheed. They were a military version of the Lockheed Lodestar. It only took Our pilots two weeks to crash all five - mostly through ground looping. We were then assigned LB30's, which was the British version of the B24. Since the British did not plan on making high altitude daylight raids, the LB30 did not have the turbo superchargers. The two things I remember most about this airplane was the nightmarish hydraulic system and that every inspection plate had a hundred Phillip's head screws. God, what I would have given for one of today's power screwdrivers.

We were only at Muroc for a short time but found it interesting because I was able to put to work what I had learned in mechanics school. Muroc was, as it is today, the place where new aircraft designs are tested. One of the prototypes that I was able to get close to and examine was Northrop's flying wing, the actual forerunner of today's stealth bomber. It was a very small plane in which the pilot laid on his stomach to fly it. It had two pusher engines with small wooden props. You could actually cover the entire airplane with two Army blankets. Another prototype I remember was what they called the flying banana. I t had a long fuselage with the engine in front and the wing and tail at the rear. It was painted yellow, hence the name.

Only a couple of things stand out in my memory of my time here. One of which was that just before Christmas, I was notified by the Chaplain that my Grandmother Shell had died. This was devastating to me since we had been so close and that I would not be able to attend her funeral.

Another experience was another visit to a dentist. I had again developed a toothache and upon examining the tooth, the dentist found a cavity that needed filling. Since this was a remote outpost at that time, the dental equipment was in a field medical kit. The drill he used to prepare the tooth for filling was foot powered, similar to an old sewing machine and it seemed to take hours to get the job done.

Shortly after the first of the year, 1942, we were reassigned to March Air Force Base in Riverside, California, where we were again assigned the Douglas B18 aircraft.

I was hardly settled in at the base when I was asked if I would like to join a crew as flight engineer that would eventually end up at Langley Field, Virginia doing submarine patrol. Lieutenant Scott would be the pilot. He had known me from New Orleans Air Force Base. I do not recall the names of the other crew members even though we were together for five months.

The pilot, co-pilot, radio operator and myself immediately took off in a B18 and headed for Boston, Massachusetts. I do not recall how long the trip took, but do remember we only flew on sunny days and landed only at civilian airports.

Upon arriving at Logan Airport in Boston, we were met by a representative of Massachusetts Institute of Technology and were told we would be there several weeks for the installation of and training for the use of the first airborne radar.

We had known when we left California that there would be no quarters for us in the Boston area and we would have to make our own arrangements for a billet. Lieutenant Scott, whose father was President of Republic Steel, had plenty of money and asked his dad to make arrangements for an apartment for us. Our apartment was on the third floor of an old brownstone house at 282 Commonwealth Avenue, one of the plush areas in Boston.

Since we were aviators in the Army in wartime, we were the toast of Boston. We got invitations to the opera. We received invitations to dinner at some of the wealthiest homes in Boston. The Jewish couple that owned and operated a delicatessen on the street behind us took us to raise. We would come home from school and find our kitchen full of food. They even furnished us a radio. The little man took me to Boston Garden several times to Burlesque shows and boxing matches. His wife said that he used me as an excuse to go to strip shows - saying he was doing it for the boy.

The RKO Theater had a different big band each week and I never missed any. There was Cab Calloway, Jimmie Dorsey, Sammy Kaye, Guy Lombardo and my favorite Jack Teagarden who played the trombone. I do not recall the others, but they were all there.

After we were trained and ready to go, we sadly said good bye to Boston and flew to Langley Field to begin our patrolling.

Every day we would take off and fly a pre-determined search route over the Atlantic, primarily looking for U Boats. We would run down every blip that showed on the radar screen.

Unfortunately, we never identified a submarine. Had we found one, with our bombing equipment, we would probably not have been able to. hit it. On one patrol, we did locate a sinking freighter that had been torpedoed. The ship was half sunk with the prow out of the water pointed up at a steep angle and there were men still hanging on to ropes. All we could do was call the Coast Guard and report it.

CHAPTER THREE Aviation Cadet & Flight Training

...your mother pinned on my Pilots Wings and 2nd Lieutenant bars

Because of the war and the fast growing need for pilots, the Army Air Corps announced in May that they would be giving tests that would determine if a soldier was qualified to attend flight school. I immediately applied to take the test and was fortunate enough to pass and be accepted as a cadet in the program.

Upon being accepted for the flight training program, I was told that I was being relieved of all my duties and that I could take a two week leave and go home.

I did not have the money for train fare so I caught a military airplane to Jacksonville, Florida and hitch hiked home. I do not recall, but I think it took about three days. No one would pass up a soldier in uniform. It was on this trip that I met your mother, but that's another story.

Upon returning from leave, I learned it would be another two weeks before I would be assigned to a class, so I took off for home again to court your mother.

Finally, on July 16, 1942, I was appointed an aviation cadet and was immediately sent to Nashville, Tennessee to await assignment to pre-flight training.

For the fourth time in my Army career, I found myself living in a tent again. What a mud hole this place was. There were no buildings of any kind. The food was terrible since I do not think the Army even knew this place existed. This was the first time that I ever ate mutton and it was a steady diet here.

This was strictly a holding camp where we had nothing to do but wait. The first weekend, several of us went into town and with nothing of interest to do, we went to a local drugstore, bought a bottle of Southern Comfort and spiked our fountain cokes. Since cadets were not allowed to drink, we had to do this surreptitiously. We finally killed the bottle and when I got up to leave I was paralyzed I do not remember how we got back to the camp, but I do remember we did not get to go back to town again.

Fortunately, we were here only a short time and were soon assigned to Maxwell Field in Montgomery, Alabama, which is now a federal prison for VIP convicts. I believe this is where the Attorney General under Nixon, Mitchell, was incarcerated for his part" in Watergate.

At Maxwell, I enjoyed the best living accommodations since I had entered the Army. Two cadets shared a room which shared a bathroom with two cadets in the room on the other side of the bathroom. I also discovered here that the cadet mess was considerably better than the enlisted mess. We had more beef, desserts, and hot rolls at every meal. I believe someone told me that the food allowance for cadets was double that of an enlisted man.

The thrust of pre-flight was two-fold. One, to prepare you to be an officer, and secondly, to prepare you for flight training. The first four and a half weeks here was absolute hell. The upper classmen who were only four weeks our senior made our life miserable through hazing. Whatever they could do to lower your self-esteem was done. You saluted all fire extinguishers. You barked

like dogs. You bowed to your hazer and on and on. I could never understand how a person with any intelligence could go through this for weeks then turn around and do it to someone else. I could not and did not.

One thing I learned real quick was that if you went everywhere on the double, the upper classmen would think you were on an errand for the cadet commandant and would leave you alone.

There was a demerit system in effect for cadets at each of the bases. 10demerits would result in one tour. Each tour was marching with a rifle for one hour up and down in front of your quarters. Tours could only be worked off on Saturdays, which would ruin your whole weekend. I do not recall how many tours I walked, but being a hot head, the upper classmen gave me plenty of demerits.

Our days at Maxwell Field were long and tiring. After reveille and before breakfast, each morning there was 30 minutes of calisthenics. This would be standard through my entire time as a cadet. After breakfast, we would spend the rest of the morning learning to be an officer, which consisted of an hour learning the traditions of the officers corps, studying the contents of the officer's manual and the rest of the morning drilling.

The cadet corps at Maxwell was divided into battalions, companies, platoons and squads just like in the infantry. As an underclassman, you were just a foot soldier in the squad, but as an upperclassman you took turns as squad leader, platoon leader, and so on. I personally never got beyond the squad leader primarily because of my age. I can tell you it made you feel kind of big putting on that Sam Brown belt, saber and white gloves when you lead the troops. We drilled every day rain or shine and had a formal corps parade every Saturday morning. By the end of our nine weeks at preflight, I can tell you that we were first class soldiers on the parade ground.

Our afternoons were spent in the classroom learning aero dynamics, Morse code, aircraft structures, power plants, dead reckoning navigation, armament, basics of instrument flying, etc. I had a leg up on most of the others, because I had learned so much about airplanes in mechanics school, as a result I finished first in my class. The one weakness I had was Morse code. I just could not get to the required 30 words per minute.

At our graduation from pre-flight, we had a big celebration including a dance at which Woody Herman's Band played. Your mother and my mother rode a train from Tulsa to St. Louis to Montgomery to attend the party. I do not recall for sure, but I think this is when your mother and I decided to get married.

The next assignment was to Primary Flight School at Albany, Georgia. The school was operated by Darr Aero Tech, a California Company, and was completely staffed by civilians, including the commandant. The only military man on the staff was a captain who gave us our check rides. .

The tremendous need for pilots for the war caused the Air Corps to compress the pilot training program from 70 weeks to 36 weeks. This meant flying and ground school five and a half days a week. If you had bad weather, you doubled up the next day.

We had no more than unpacked our clothes when we were sent to the flight line to meet our instructor. The instructor, Joe Friday, (I never watched Dragnet without thinking of him) was

assigned six cadets Benvenisti, Briscoe, Brule, Bruggerman, Case, and myself. Friday spent several minutes explaining what we would be doing for the next nine weeks and what he would expect of us. He also told us that we would hear horror stories about ground looping the PT17, a top heavy airplane, but to pay no attention. If we did it his way, we would not ground loop. If we did ground loop, start packing. He explained that since we would be flying from a perfectly square grass field, we had no close references to use to keep the airplane going in a straight line, so we had to pick something on the horizon such as a tree or telephone pole and if the nose strayed from that point, make an immediate correction with the rudder pedals. It worked.

When we left pre-flight, we left all of the drilling, the hazing and the parades behind. For the next 27 weeks, our days would be filled with flying and ground school and our evenings devoted to homework. After all, we were going to accomplish in 27 weeks what our predecessors had taken 60 weeks to accomplish.

The ground school was just an extension of what we had studied in pre-flight so it remained fairly easy for me. It was the flying that captured our imagination and the discussion of it filled our hours.

On the second day at Albany, we were issued our flight clothing, which included the famous leather Jacket which I would use for the rest of my time in the service, a fur lined flight suit, two helmets, one made of canvas with gosports ear tubes and a fur lined leather one with gosports Gosports, incidentally, is the way the instructor communicated with the student. There was a tube with a "Y" in it that attached to your helmet ear pieces and on the other end was a funnel shaped mouth piece that the instructor talked into. Kinda reminded me of the string and tin cans we talked through as kids. My instructor had a better way of communicating. When he was angry, he would grab the control stick and bang it back and forth against your knees. It only took one of these bangings to get your attention.

We would go to the flight line in the morning one day and then in the afternoon the next day, so that we would experience the different air current and flight conditions. Mornings would be smooth and afternoons usually bumpy. While on the flight line, you would usually fly for one hour then spend three hours hangar flying or playing hearts. I must have played 10,000 games of heart by the time I completed the cadet program.

Words cannot describe the exhilaration of my first flight as a student. When the instructor took me out to the airplane, I was excited and had great anticipation, but there was also a great concern. Not from a fear of flying but from a fear of not being able to learn to fly. After all, the wash out rate in primary was almost 50%.

On our first walk around and pre-flight of the airplane, I became acquainted with what I would be flying for the next nine weeks. The airplane was a Stearman PT17 built by Boeing. It was a cloth and dope covered bi-plane with a Jacobs 225 HP engine and two open cockpits. The engine was started with an inertia type starter which was wound up with a two handle crank operated by a flight line attendant who was usually a girl. It had a very narrow landing gear with long struts which, coupled with its top heaviness, made it difficult to handle on the ground.

After the pre-flight, he showed me how to get into the cockpit, which was no easy task with a bulky flight suit and a seat parachute, and how to buckle in. He explained the various instruments -

(not many) - and controls - (not many). After we both were settled in, he instructed me through the gosport how to start the engine, which consisted of priming, yelling clear, then crank, then contact which told the line attendant to pull the starter engager. I was told to put my hands and feet on the controls and follow through with the instructor as he taxied, took off and flew the airplane. It was not a long flight, but he demonstrated the use of each of the controls by making gentle climbs and descents and turns in each direction. He then allowed me to do the same maneuvers. Probably the most difficult thing for me to get use to was the rudders, especially on the ground. Had I been a farmer and driven a tractor, this would have been an easy adjustment.

The next day, Joe Friday began teaching us to fly. We learned to taxi, take off, and handle the airplane in the air. As the hours mounted, we did stalls, spins, lazy eights, steep and shallow turns and landings. On the day of my solo, I took off with a total of six and a half hours flying time. We flew over to a small grass field which we used to practice take offs and landings and after two or three landings, my instructor told me to taxi over to the road and he climbed out of the cockpit. Standing on the wing, he leaned in and said "The way you're flying you're probably going to kill yourself and I would just as soon not be with you. Shoot three landings and come back and get me."

I did not have an inkling that I would solo that day, since the normal time for solo was between 9 and 12 hours. Because I was not expecting it, I did not get nervous. Although I have to admit that I forgot to put my goggles down before I started my first take off run, so trying to control the airplane while fumbling for my goggles made for an erratic take off. I probably made the three best landings of my life that day, because I really concentrated and knew that the instructor had shown a great deal of confidence in me to let me solo so early (I was the first in my class). My flight log showed seven hours and five minutes when I soloed. Today they would cut a piece out of your shirttail when you soloed. However, our shirts were government issued, so they threw you in the goldfish pond in front of headquarters instead.

The forty hours flying in primary would be more enjoyable than all the hours I have flown since. I cannot begin to put into words the thrill of flying an open cockpit airplane, with the wind in your face and nothing between you and the sky. You could live the aviators poem - "Break the earthly bonds and soar and touch the face of God -".

My three pilot sons will know the term "fly by the seat of your pants". In the PT17, this was the way you did it. Our only instruments were a compass, engine oil gauge and an altimeter. You judged your engine speed by the sound of the engine and your air speed by the sound of the wind through the wire wing braces. Of course, you couldn't put a number to it, but you learned pretty quick the sound you had to hear if you did not want to undershoot or overshot your landing.

Soon after soloing, the instructor spent a lot of time teaching aerobatics, which he loved to do, taking cross countries and buzzing the alligators in the swamp. On our solo flights, we practiced stalls, spins, aerobatics and made short triangular cross countries. It was my second solo after receiving aerobatics instructions before I could get up the nerve to do them on my own, but after I did get the nerve, that was all I wanted to do.

Of the six cadets that were assigned to Joe Friday, three washed out, Benveniste, Brule and Case. Briscoe, who later was the best man at our wedding, had the toughest time of the three who completed primary training. He would get air sick about every flight for the first eight or ten flying hours. Bennett you will read about later and Broyles was the first pilot in the group of pilots I went

overseas with to be shot down.

I cannot recall the dates when I moved from one station to another, but I believe that I moved to Basic Flying School at Greenville Army Air Base in Mississippi in early December. Here again, we were rushed right into training. The second day in Greenville, we were introduced to our instructor, Pilot Officer Hatfield. Hatfield was in the British RAF and had been trained to fly in this country and was repaying our government by instructing in our cadet program.

The airplane we would be flying was a BT13 built by Vultee Air Craft Company. The airplane had a fixed gear, tandem enclosed cockpits, fuselage made of plywood, and a controllable pitch prop. It had flaps operated by a hand crank and a full compliment of instruments including attitude instruments. It would be our first introduction to two way radio communications and radio navigation. The airplane was affectionately known by the name Vultee Vibrator. Since the engine and prop were not a good mate, the airplane always shook.

It was flying this airplane that we learned the landing check list. "GUMP". (Gas, undercarriage, Mixture and Prop) We learned early that when you pushed the prop control forward with gusto the prop squalled like a wounded elephant. So it was when turning on final over the neighbors homes that we completed our checklist with gusto.

The BT13 was a fairly docile airplane to fly, although it would give you very little indication of an approaching stall, and we had a couple of crashes when a cadet stalled out in his turn on final approach.

Pilot officer Hatfield was a very conservative pilot. He did not like vertical turns nor aerobatics. After we got through our check out and were flying solo, he took us up and demonstrated each aerobatics maneuver and said that is how it is done, you go do it on your own. Because of his dislike for the exciting part of flying, his students spent an inordinate amount of time flying instruments. This had two advantages for the instructor, one, he did not have to go through all the violent maneuvers and two, since the cadets flew instruments from the rear cockpit, the instructor was up front and would do the take offs and landings and not have to ride blind in the rear cockpit and trust a 50 hour whiz to land the thing in one piece. We all resented this at the time, but later in England when every flight was an instrument flight I thanked my lucky stars that I had all that training.

This is probably as good a time as any to tell you youngsters that learned to fly with such navigation and instrument landing systems as OMNI, DME, LORAN, Radar, ILS, etc, how the old man did it. We had two radio navigational aids, the old radio range stations that cr isscrossed the country and the Automatic Direction Finder. The low frequency range was made up of five antennas, two of the antennas that were directly across from one another sent out the signal IIAII in Morse code, dit dah, and the other two sent out the signal IINII which was dah dit. These signals would project four legs of a range that were oriented in predetermined and published directions. In order to home in on a particular leg, you would first orient yourself as to which quadrant you were in by the clear IIAII or IINII you were receiving and knowing from what direction you were coming. Let's say you were in the N.E. IINII quadrant and you were heading in a south westerly direction and you wanted to home in on the leg that ran west. As you approached the beam, you would gradually start hearing the "A" signal overlapping the IIN" signal and the closer you got to the beam, the more the two signals merged and you would start changing your direction so that you could slide into the

beam at a very low angle and bracket the feathered edge, which sounded like dit dah dit dah dit dah. If you flew through the feathered edge, you would get a solid tone because the "A" and the "N" completely overlapped. If you flew on through the beam, you would start getting an "A" and you would have to start over again. As you approached the center of the range, the beam would narrow and it would become more difficult to maintain your position on this feathered edge. When passing the station, there would be silence - it was called the cone of silence - where you received no signal at all and you knew where you were and would begin your instrument approach to the field. The instrument approach would be either just taking up a heading to the field and computing time and distance or, if you were lucky, there would be a non directional beacon at the field and you could home in on that with your ADF.

Even on long distance flights, I would primarily depend on the ADF for navigation unless there were thunderstorms that interfered with the signal. In order to conserve fuel and time, you had to try to calculate wind dr ift and figure a deflection in the direction the needle pointed to maintain a fairly direct heading to the station. If you did not do this, you might end up flying a fish hook track caused by wind drifts. If, when you turned to the station and zeroed your instrument pointer you might be headed due west and through constant centering of the needle to compensate for drift you might end up approaching the station from due south.

Because of the great difficulty in flying the radio beam and its nerve racking sounds, I usually navigated with and made my instrument approaches on ADF even if I had to use a commercial radio station to home in on.

During my last week at Greenville, I injured my left shoulder in a pick up basketball game, so I could not fly solo and was in danger of not finishing with my class. However, my instructor agreed to fly with me and work the throttle and crank the flaps for my last three or four flights.

Greenville will always hold a special place in my memory, because your mother and I were married in the post chapel on January 16, 1943.

Midway through basic flight training, we were given an opportunity to decide whether we wanted to become a fighter pilots or a transport or bomber pilot. I opted for the bombers and was later assigned to multi-engine advanced at Blytheville, Arkansas.

Our first twenty hours were flown in the Beech Aircraft ATIO. The ATIO was made of plywood, had a retractable gear, a two man cabin with side by side seating. The airplane was very docile, slow and not too responsive to the controls. The second half of our advanced training was taken in the Curtis AT9, a small all metal multi-engine with two speeds flying and stalling. It probably handled more like a fighter than a bomber.

I do not recall my instructors name, probably because I disliked him so much. He was my first instructor who was an American military officer, a Captain. His style was to intimidate rather than motivate. He constantly threatened to wash us out of the program, but we were smart enough to realize that the Army had too much invested in us to wash us out at that late date. However, we did have to be concerned whether we would be recommended for training as an aircraft commander or become a co-pilot. We would not know the selection until we received our orders the day of graduation.

In advance, we would for the first time be flying with another cadet, when not flying with an instructor. We would alternate as pilot and co-pilot. Here I must do a little bragging - I was teamed with Bradnan, Bennett, and Brisco and I learned real quick these guys were not in my league in flying, although two of them became aircraft commanders.

I can remember one night after checking out in the AT9, we were to shoot touch and go landings on an auxiliary field using smudge pots to outline a runway. Bradnan was to fly the first half hour and I was to fly the second. On the first landing, he hit so hard it jarred our headsets off and they fell in the floor behind us. I suggested we better go back to the main air base and have the airplane checked for damage.

Even though I disliked the instructor, he was a good pilot and I learned a lot from him. He was excellent at formation flying and was not afraid to stick the wing in there on the other aircraft and he made damned sure I did the same. This training would be a godsend when we got to England.

As we approached the end of our cadet training, we all became more confident in our ability to fly and the excitement was mounting in anticipation of our graduation, commissioning as an officer, and our next assignment.

On Apr il 28, 1943, Class 43D graduated and we were discharged from cadet rank to accept a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant in the regular Army Air Corps.

We entered the hall wearing our new officers uniform, cadet hat and carrying our officers cap. After the ceremony, your mother pinned on my Pilots Wings and 2nd Lieutenant bars and I donned the hat and left the building. It was the custom for the enlisted personnel to line up and salute the new officers and the first to salute received a dollar bill. I am glad we did not have to pay them all.

Later that day we all received our assignment orders and I was delighted to learn my assignment was to Lockbourne AAB in Columbus, Ohio where I would receive transition training and become an aircraft commander on the B17 Flying Fortress.

CHAPTER FOUR B-17 Transition

Soon after arrival, I began selecting my crew of nine men

As in advanced Bradnan, Bennett and I would have the same instructor. However, Brisco was sent to a DC3 transport squadron as a co-pilot and would later become a first pilot. Our instructor in the B17 was a former Pam Am Captain that had been called to active duty. He was an excellent instructor and I was able to Breeze through the training in about 30 hours.

It was here that I learned how poor a pilot Bennett really was. I had flown with him in advanced, but flying a four engine, 65,000 pound airplane with 4,000 horse power was a far cry from a 3,000 pound trainer with 450 horse power. Bennett's flying was sloppy and he had to constantly refer to his notes in a little notebook to know what to do next. Why he was not assigned as a co-pilot, I will never know.

After completing the transition training, your mother and I traveled to Alexandria, Louisiana where I would begin my training for an overseas assignment.

Soon after arrival, I began selecting my crew of nine men. I cannot now recall on what basis I selected these men save one, and that was my dear departed friend Lucian Wright. What better reason for selecting a man than the fact he was from Oklahoma and what a great selection it was. "Okie" was the glue that held our crew together for the next year.

Besides "Okie", who would become my assistant engineer and waist gunner, I selected Lieutenant Camosy an Italian boy from Racine, Wisconsin as my co-pilot, my navigator Trendell from Syracuse, New York, the bombardier Lieutenant Athern from Deer Lodge, Montana, the engineer and top turret gunner Pete Peterson from St. Louis, Missouri, Norm Bunin, a Jewish boy from Queens, New York was the radio operator, Nick Merletti, an Italian from New Haven, Con_ecticut was the other waist gunner and a hell of a trumpet player. Modell was the ball turret gunner and Mel Brandt from Evansville, Indiana was the tail gunner.

There was a lot of orientation training at this base, learning the air and naval vessels of the axis and the Japanese. We were pretty sure we would not be going to the Pacific, however, we still were trained to recognize their equipment and their air and naval tactics as we were for the Germans and Italians.

Our flying was either taking long day or night cross countries or practice bombing raids and air to air gunnery. Even though 'our airplanes were equipped with auto pilots, I never had one that worked, so cross country flying was hard work. In our practice bombing missions, we would usually form into a six ship squadron, fly to the Mississippi delta where there was a practice range and we would drop 100 pound practice bombs. After dropping the bombs, we would continue out over the gulf and practice gunnery by firing at a target towed by a B25.

It was on one of these missions that disaster struck. I had been flying the diamond position, which was the leader position of the second echelon, with two wing men on the bombing run. After leaving the target, the instructor who was flying with my good friend Bradnan on my left wing, called and asked me to drop back and let them take the diamond position and to reform on his left wing. Shortly after we made the. formation change, Bennett who was flying right wing in the first echelon, for some reason lost control of his airplane, dropped back and down and his props cut through the

cockpit of Bradnan's plane. Both airplanes came apart and only a few parachutes were seen. We immediately radioed for Coast Guard help and I went down and circled the wreckage. We jettisoned the two life rafts that were located in the top of the fuselage above each wing. No survivors were recovered. The really sad thing about this accident was the fact that Bennett was a lousy pilot and should not have been in a position to cause the accident.

On the day of the accident, I was scheduled to take over as airdrome officer of the day at 5:00 p.m., which was a kind of blessing. I did not want to go home and tell mother of the accident and I certainly did not want to talk to Bradnan's wife. After assuming duty as airdrome officer, I told the sergeant on duty that I was going to the movie to take my mind off of the days events and if he needed me I would be on the back row in the base theater. I do not recall for sure, but I think this is when I saw "Gone With the Wind" the first time.

As we were scheduled to go overseas after this assignment, we had to bring our shot records up to date and to take several new shots. The only thing significant about this was that we discovered that our bombardier was scared to death of a needle. When we were scheduled for the first shots, I actually had to go find him and drag him to the dispensary. When we were waiting our turn, I told the officers we would go first followed by the enlisted men, however, Athern insisted on going last.

I took my shots first then I waited for all the crew to go through. When they hit Athern with the first needle, he passed out and if one of the orderlies had not been fast he would have hit the floor. When we took the follow up shots I made Athern go first and he would pass out each time. It made me wonder how he would be when that first shot was fired at us in combat.

While at Alexandria, we had a hurricane alert and we had to fly all the airplanes to other bases until the danger past. I elected to go to Smyrna, Tennessee another B17 RTC. It was on that trip that I met your mother's brother, Tommy, who would be going to England about the same time as would I.

We completed our training in October and were sent by troop train to Fort Dix, New Jersey to await transportation to either England or North Africa.

CHAPTER FIVE Off to England

My crew was assigned to the 323rd Bomber Squadron

When we were finally given our orders to England, we were issued all of the overseas gear, including metal helmets, gas masks, goulashes, ponchos, etc. The sad part of this was we would never use the gear, but had to carry it on and off the ship and guard it since it was our responsibility.

On the night of October 30, 1943, we were transported by truck to the New York City Harbor to board the Queen Mary for transport to England and the morning of October 31st, we began our race across the North Atlantic.

On a ship that would normally carry 1,200 passengers, there were 17,000 soldiers and airmen. There were 12 officers assigned to a cabin designed to carry two passengers. There were four bunks on each of three walls and with 24 duffel bags in the middle of the room you had to climb down into the two lower bunks. My co-pilot was so afraid that we would be torpedoed and he would be unable to get out of the bottom bunk that he spent his nights in the passageways.

We were told by the Captain that we would make the crossing in under six days by cruising at a speed of 28 knots. We were also told that no submarine was fast enough to overtake us, which was comforting.

The dining room on the ship was designed to seat 1,200, so it could not begin to accommodate 17,000 nor was the kitchen large enough to prepare three meals a day for 17,000. Because of these limitations, we were fed only twice each day and the meals were not that filling. Remembering this experience, on my next trip overseas during the Korean War, I carried a duffle bag full of food aboard including some of your mother's apricot fried pies, only to find that we would be served four meals a day and have a coffee break with rolls at 10:00 in the morning. But that's another story.

On the evening of the 5th day, we anchored off shore at Glasgow, Scotland and were transported ashore on powered barges, which they called lighters.

The 48 air crews that were aboard the ship were taken by truck to a holding camp on the outskirts of Glasgow. We were too late for supper at the camp that evening, so my other officers and I found a tea room in the small village and damned near ate everything in the place. The only thing I really remember about this British camp is the toilet paper. It reminded me of craft paper.

The day following our arrival in Scotland, we were put on a civilian train to London where the 48 crews would be split up and sent to different air bases. I do not recall the first base my crew was sent to, but do remember it was just a short distance from London and it was a temporary air base with Quonset huts, mud streets and lean-tos for hangers. It was at this base I was issued my first English bicycle for transportation and I immediately wrecked it by running it under the back of a truck - I forgot you had hand brakes and I was trying to stop it with the pedals.

It was a few days after arriving at this base, the Eighth Air Force lost over 60 airplanes on the Schwinfurt raid. The 91st bomb group had heavy losses on this "raid and sent out a request for replacement crews and we were selected as one of them.

The 91st bomb group was based at the Bassingbourn Air Base located at Royston, England, which had for many years before the war been an RAF air base and had beautiful quarters, dining rooms, officers clubs, flight line buildings and hangers.

When we first arrived, they had not yet cleaned out the rooms of the crews who were lost so the officers were temporarily billeted in an enlisted dormitory with probably 24 bunks to each floor. This billeting is significant to my story.

My crew was assigned to the 323rd Bomber Squadron commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Bishop. At our first orientation the command pilots were told by the squadron commander that we would fly our first mission as a co-pilot with an experienced crew (real experience during this phase of the war was five missions), so that we could observe the take off, climb to altitude and the forming of the squadrons, then into groups, then into wings for the bombing mission. My second mission would be with my own crew with the responsibility for the nine lives.

Incidentally, the 323rd Bomb Squadron was the Squadron of the Memphis" Belle that made the war bond tour after it returned to the states and was the squadron to which Clark Gable was assigned as an aerial photographer. He flew five missions.

To look back over a broad expanse of time represented by 47 years and recall each detail of a period of your life that spanned only four and a half months and was really compressed into only 13 days is very difficult. Had I chosen to write this even 25 years ago, I could probably have written in vivid detail of every moment in those 13 days for I relived them almost every day for many years. For years, I refused to discuss the war experience, thinking that by not talking about it, it would cause it to fade from memory, and in reality, it did.

One of the things I found strange at first was the lack of discussion of the day I s missions by the pilots. I soon found that they did not want to relive it. Because of this lack of communication, I was unprepared for the combat experience. Oh, I knew that it was dangerous, that airplanes went down and airmen were killed or lost, but I was not prepared to see it happen.

Maybe our squadron commander having lived through a first mission had more reason to send the pilots out as co-pilots on their first mission than just to learn the mechanics of a mission. It could have been that he wanted us to have that initial shock while only observing.

In my first days at Bassingbourn, as I would for my entire stay there, I would go to the flight line every afternoon when a mission was underway to welcome home the airplanes returning, and, of course, count those returning. In observing the returning aircraft, I was amazed at the number damaged and even more amazed at the damage a B17 could sustain and still get back. I saw them with tails almost gone, outer wing panels gone, jagged flak holes in the fuselage, even
entire nose sections gone, and, of course, lots of feathered props.

By today's standards, the B17 was primitive, but in 1944 it was the state of the art. It was not a big airplane, al though then it was called a heavy bomber and considered huge. There are fighter planes in today's Air Force that are larger and carry more bomb tonnage than did the B17, and even more amazing, today' s fighter bomber has a crew of one or
maybe two, while it took a crew of 10 to handle the B17.

After all these years it is difficult to remember a lot of the details of the airplane, but I can recall the general specifications and configurations. It was powered by four R1820 Curtis Wright engines of one thousand horsepower each. With the extended range fuel tanks, we carried 2,800 gallons of gasoline, which gave us a normal range of 11 1/2 hours. However, on two occasions, we stretched it beyond 12 hours. Normal indicated airspeed was 155 m.p.h. which meant that with our turbo superchargers, we could reach altitudes of 35,000 feet where we could have a true airspeed of 220 m.p.h. After the time to climb to cruising altitude and the time to form into a wing, we would have about 9 1/2 hours fuel remaining, which gave us a maximum target range of approximately 1,000 miles with zero wind.

The B17 was dubbed the Flying Fortress, because of its heavy armaments. The F Model had nine 50 caliber machine guns and the G Model had ten. The two guns in the tail could cover an area of probably 45°. The waist guns covered 120° and the ball turret and top turret had 360° capability. The Germans learned very early that coming in from the tail was hazardous to their health, since we could concentrate eight guns to the rear and with their much slower closure rate, they stayed within gun range much longer.

The only protection in the airplane against enemy fire were the 2! inch thick windshield and side windows in the cockpit. Some of the pilots had armor plate put in their seats, but that was the extent of armor. Aluminum sheeting 1/16 inch thick does not give a whole lot of protection against a 30 or 50 caliber machine gun bullet.

Controls were about what you had in a 150 except in the case of the engine controls, you had four of each and the additional turbo charger controls. The control wheel was on a yoke that rose between your legs. The throttles were designed so that you could grasp all four in one hand simultaneously. However, the prop controls, mixture controls and turbo charger controls had to be moved individually. In flying formation where the pilot had to be constantly jockeying the throttle, it kept the co-pilot busy synchronizing the props and adjusting the turbos.

The airplane had a designed gross weight of 65,000 pounds. Having never done a weight and balance before a mission, I can only guess that we were always well over gross at take off. We had only 5,000 foot runways and it was imperative you get the gear up the moment you left the runway or you would take the fence with you.

CHAPTER SIX Early Missions

I will not try to describe all of my missions (there were 13 regular and four diversionary)

One day in December 1943, after having been at Bassingbourn for almost a month, I was awakened by the orderly and told to report to briefing for a mission. I do not now recall the name of the pilot with whom I would fly, but do remember that this was his fifth mission.

The target this day was Wilhelmshaven on the north coast of Germany. The briefing officers told us that our route of flight would be mostly over the North Sea, so we would encounter no flak until just before reaching the target, but we could expect heavy fighter opposition as we neared the Dutch Coast an hour or so before making land fall at Norden Germany, 40 miles from the target.

For the first few hours, the only exciting part of the mission was the mad scramble to get into formation. After we were out over the North Sea, I relieved the pilot, but found it difficult to fly formation from the right seat. Since their was no enemy activity, the pilot let me struggle along.

On this mission, our wing was not leading the 8th Air Force as it usually did. We were probably the 3rd or 4th wing in line. Having the other wings ahead gave me an opportunity to observe the contrails for the first time and the fighter activity against the wing ahead before they hit us. As the co-pilot on this mission, it was my job to direct the fire power so I had my head in a constant swivel.

After the attack began on the wing ahead, I could see airplanes starting to go down. I cannot tell you the feeling I had and the fear I felt when I saw an airplane ahead with half its wing missing spinning out of control. By the time the fighters reached our wing, the P38's and PSI's had arrived and the enemy activities was pretty much limited to trying to survive against our fighters. The P38 and PSI were far superior to what the Germans had, so the odds were in our favor in the dog fights.

Finally, when the first wing reached Norden, the antiaircraft guns began firing. By the time we reached the area, the sky was black with flak bursts. The pilot said "If you can see it, it will not hurt you." It was the ones I could not see that worried me.

We had very little damage to our airplane and we could not determine whether the damage was from flak fragments or 50 caliber empties from the airplane ahead. I did see, however, two airplanes explode from direct flak hits.

We dropped our bombs as planned and the trip home was uneventful. The first let down into England was when I discovered that when the adrenalin stops flowing and you relax you get awfully cold. I also learned something else on the mission. Nose drainage inside the oxygen mask is constantly running down into your mouth. The next day, I started growing a mustache and found it was great for trapping the drainage because it would freeze on your mustache.

The next morning after this first mission, we awoke to find dense fog that would last for several days. The fog was so thick that we would get lost going to the officers mess. On one

occasion, I started out for operations on the flight line and ended up a half mile down the ramp from where I should have been. The weather stayed bad through most of December, which severely limited the number of missions we could fly. It would be February before we would have the radar equipped path finder aircraft with which we could bomb through cloud cover.

The morning after the fog lifted, a sergeant from operations came into the bay where we were sleeping and awakened a couple of crews that were scheduled for a mission that morning. When the activity awakened all of us, my copilot sat up in his bunk and began sobbing. We were not one of the crews scheduled, in fact, we had not even been assigned an airplane yet, so we all went back to sleep.

Later in the morning, the co-pilot, Camosy, informed me and the other crew members that he was not going to fly anymore. After breakfast I sat down with Camosy and explained to him that he really did not have a choice. I told him that he had made a commitment to the service and had been trained for a particular job and it was his duty to perform it. I also explained that his refusal to fly could result in a court martial, demotion and even a dishonorable discharge. I said what the hell, we are all scared, since we are boys doing a man's job, but we have to do what we were sent here to do. He agreed to fly.

Some time that week, we were assigned our first airplane, named Gay Caballero by its first crew, a B17F that had survived for 25 missions - one of the few to have that distinction. The F Model did not have the long range tanks called Tokyo tanks, or the nose turret. Because of the lack of range, we had to carry a 500 gallon bomb bay tank and could only carry a half load of bombs.

We flew a couple of practice missions in order to familiarize the crew and myself with the airplane and to elevate our skills. Remember that the crew had not flown since leaving Alexandria, Louisiana, seven weeks earlier. I had only flown that one time as a co-pilot. After I told the squadron commander we were ready to go, we were scheduled on the next mission.

At the briefing the next morning, we learned our target would be to Düsseldorf, Germany on the Rhine River. This target was at the top of the Ruhr valley and was particularly dreaded because of the heavy concentration of anti aircraft batteries and you had to fly over Belgium where the Abbeville kids, the Luftwaffe elite, were based. It would be a 10 hour mission.

It was our normal procedure to take off at two minute intervals, establish a rate of climb of 500 feet per minute with an indicated airspeed of 120 miles per hour. This meant that with a 36 airplane group, it would be one hour and 10 minutes between the take off of the first airplane and the last and an hour and 52 minutes before the last airplane would reach the rendezvous altitude of 20,000 feet. By the time the wing was formed and headed toward the target, you had already consumed more than two hours of fuel. We would later take off at one minute intervals as our targets got deeper into Germany. In our airplane, we would have emptied our bomb bay fuel tank by the time we reached the English Channel or the North Sea and the bombardier would open the bomb bays and jettison the tank. I had a fear of carrying a tank full of explosive fumes into areas where we could expect enemy gun fire.

On this day, the clouds were at least 18,000 feet thick and I learned how tiring both physically and mentally it was to fly instruments for this long a time knowing that the clouds were saturated with hundreds of airplanes. I also found out how nerve wracking it is to chase allover the

sky like a bunch of bees trying to get into your position in the formation.

As we left the English Coast, the gunners tested their guns and a bit later, the bombardier dropped the fuel tank. It was at this moment that my co-pilot took out his 45 automatic and ordered me to return to England. I told Camosy that if he did not have the guts to fly a combat mission, he certainly did not have the guts to pull the trigger. I also pointed out that if he shot me, he would kill himself and the crew trying to land the plane.

When we returned from the mission and were being debriefed, I reported the problem with the co-pilot and I never saw him again. He was transferred to another base and assigned as a mess officer. I later learned that he was demoted to a private and given a choice of flying as a tail gunner or be dishonorably discharged. He chose the tail gunner assignment and was killed. Could it be he knew he was doomed from the start?

I never really faulted Camosy for his actions, for we were all scared. For each of us on the crew, some inner strength or mental acceptance caused us to go on. I can remember Bunin saying after each mission he could not go on, but he always did and was a hero in his own way.

After the second mission, I was assigned a new co-pilot, Mercereau, and he and I were moved to the squadron pilots house and Trendell and Athern to the officers BOQ. The BOQ had two advantages over the pilots house, it was closer to the bar and to the officers mess.

The next mission, my third, was Bremen, a city 60 miles southeast of my first target, Wilhelmshaven. On this mission, we would be over land about a half hour longer than on the first mission. This meant earlier attacks from fighters and more time over areas where there were anti aircraft batteries. In fact, there was a very heavy concentration of anti aircraft guns on the West Frisian Islands off the Dutch Coast.

We had our usual fighter intercept, which was handled nicely by our P47 thunderbolts. If anything, we had fewer enemy fighters on this mission than on the previous one, because the B26's had departed England an hour before us to bomb Pas De Calais and had drawn a number of fighters south. Flak was heavy especially around the target, however, the enemy actions was less important than the damage we sustained on take off.

After leaving the ground and establishing our speed and beginning our climb, I felt a heavy bump to the airplane. Since we were in the clouds already, I could not see anything so assumed I had struck a radio antenna. The engines were running smoothly and there seemed to be no problem with the controls so we continued on our way. Upon landing, after the mission, as we slowed in our rollout, I noticed the right wing dropping. I later learned that we had impacted another airplane just outboard of the number three engine and had broken the main wing spar. The engineering officer explained that as long as we were flying, the lift of the wing kept it in place. It was only after we stopped flying that the spar separated and drooped. The airplane was retired after 27 missions.

The airplane we had hi t in the clouds had taken off immediately behind us and the only thing we could figure out was that he had picked up considerable speed before starting his climb and had pulled up in front of us.

After the loss of the Gay Caballero, we had to wait several days for a new airplane to arrive

from the states. It was a pause that we really appreciated.

CHAPTER SEVEN Daily Grind

I only weighed 128 pounds and was not a particularly athletic person anyway, so each mission would drain me physically

Being awakened at 3 o'clock in the morning, knowing it was a mission day, put a knot in the pit of the stomach. You would almost be in a trance when you hit the cold floor in an unheated bedroom. You had to force yourself to go through the routine of dressing and preparing yourself for whatever lay ahead.

In the briefing this day, we learned our target would be Hanover, a well fortified target deeper inland than the previous three targets. We knew that once again we would be flying through the territory guarded by dreaded Abbeville kids and their MEIO9 fighters.

For this mission, we were assigned a new B17G that had just arrived from the states the day before. It had all the latest improvements including a nose turret with two 50 caliber guns and the long range Tokyo tanks. After the briefing, we were trucked out to the airplane, which was parked on the ramp in front of the tower. The machine gun barrels were still in the guns with the nozzles covered with tape to protect them from moisture. My ball turret gunner, as it was normal to do, charged the guns and pushed the triggers before loading the guns. What Modell did not know was that there was a shell still in the chamber and it fired. The bullet penetrated the right front tire and wheel of a G.I. truck that was pulling a bomb carrier to our aircraft. I will never forget the two black soldiers leaving that truck on a dead run to the. left and right side of the truck.

The take off and rendezvous went off smoothly and we were almost to the Belgium Coast when we were jumped by the checkered Abbeville kids. They were soon repulsed by our P47's and some Polish flown Spitfires.

As we approached Germany about 150 miles from our target, we noticed a squadron of what I thought were FW190's at 12 o'clock high coming towards us. As the aircraft approached and our gunners began firing, Mercereau said cease firing, they are our P47' s coming in. About that time, a 20 millimeter canon shell exploded in the top of the cockpit. The explosion ripped out the top of the flight deck cabin causing not only havoc in the cockpit, but causing the flare gun to drop on my head. I quickly looked at the co-pilot and could see he was uninjured. However, I was reluctant to look behind me, because I was afraid Pete would be dead. When I finally looked, I could see him rotating his turret as if nothing had happened. Needless to say, any airplane that approached us directly from then on were shot at.

As an aside here, each crew member was issued a steel helmet just like those used by the Infantry, except the sides were shaped so that it would fit over the radio headsets. We were also issued flak jackets ,which were made of heavy metal strips sewn into a canvas vest. I never wore either, because they were too heavy and restricted my movement too much for me to properly fly the airplane. Since one of my greatest fears was being shot in the butt, I sat on my flak vest and used the helmet for a potty. The helmet fit perfectly in the box that surrounded the control yoke and I could use it to urinate without even looking. Since it was 50 degrees below zero at the mission altitudes, the urine would freeze immediately, so when you landed all you had to do was dump a block of ice.

While we are on the subject of gear, I should talk about the clothing and equipment we used or wore on our missions. In the B17, there was no insulation for noises or cold. In the waist, there

were two large openings to accommodate the gun mountings and guns. There was no heating system that would work at the temperature we experienced. For these reasons, the crew members were provided with electrically heated suits resembling heated blankets made into long underwear. We were also issued fur lined jackets and pants, fur lined gauntlets with silk inserts and fur lined boots. I wore only the gauntlets and the boots since the jacket and pants were too restrictive.

My normal dress for a mission was my regular underwear, my officer's wool shirt and slacks, a pullover sweater, a gabardine flight suit, my A3 leather jacket and my dress hat with its 50 mission crush (how the brass hated the way we messed up our caps). I would not really feel the cold until we began our let down back to England when we would loosen up the formation and begin to relax. The hard work of flying a tight formation for 8 to 12 hours and the release of adrenalin due to stress would keep me warm. Remember, your dad was a five foot nine, 128 pound weakling, flying a 65,000 pound airplane without boosted controls.

Now back to the mission - we were taking wave after wave of fighter attacks. It was like an aerial circus with the German fighters doing slow rolls through our formation, which was supposed to throw off the gunners aim. Each pass they made would cause more damage to us and complete loss to others. The fighters did not let up until'we flew into the area where the flak barrages began.

After we left the target and the flak area, the ride home was uneventful. I asked the crew to assess the damage, so I would know what to expect on landing back at the base. It appeared that, beyond the flight deck damage, which was not critical, there was considerable damage to the trailing edge of the left wing, considerable damage to the rudder (I could tell this by the way the controls responded). On our approach to the landing, the co-pilot lowered the gear and got an indication that they were down. When he started the flaps down, the airplane immediately rolled to the left which told me only the right flap was extending. I immediately called for retraction and landed hot without flaps.

After we parked at the ramp, we walked around the airplane to inspect the damage. I cannot recall how many holes were in the airplane, but there were hundreds. Most of the damage appeared to be from 30 caliber machine gun bullets, but the cockpit damage and rudder damage were obviously from 20 millimeter canon shells. The airplane was towed to the maintenance hanger and we never saw it again.

In our debriefing, we learned our squadron had lost two aircraft. We had seen one of them go down and the group had lost seven. Also, in the debriefing, we reported the shooting of the truck (our own) and claimed two fighter kills that were later confirmed. In all, we would be credited with six fighters downed, so I guess if we were a fighter plane, we would all be aces.

This is probably a good time to talk about the debriefing exercises that followed each mission.

After the gunners stored the flight gear and cleaned and stored gun barrels, we would meet with an Intelligence Officer. We would report everything that happened during the mission including how many fighters we observed, flak intensity, bomb damage, whether or not our fighter cover met us as planned, and so on. While making these reports, we were served burnt sugar cake and a glass of Scotch whiskey - the cake for nourishment and the whiskey for nerves. I did not like either, but needed them both. By the time this debriefing began, we would have been without food or drink for

up to 14 hours.

At the morning briefing, we would be given a package containing French and German currency and two chocolate bars for use in case we bailed out over enemy territory. Some of the crew members managed to take bites of the chocolate between puffs of oxygen, but I could never take my hands off the controls to try.

While on the subject of food, the flight crews were fed the same as the ground officers except on mission day when we were issued fresh eggs, oranges and apples. Since I did not like oranges, I tried to trade them for eggs, but got very few takers. The regular food was powdered eggs, powdered milk, spam, potatoes and Brussels sprouts. Occasionally, we would have poultry and beef, but not often. One advantage my crew had was that Athern would get acquainted with and bribe the mess sergeants with whiskey so we could usually scrounge a pretty good meal in the middle of the night.

I mentioned earlier that I only weighed 128 pounds and was not a particularly athletic person anyway, so each mission would drain me physically. If I can, let me explain the physical aspect of flying in a tight formation with a 65,000 pound truck. In order to maintain your position on your lead ship, you were constantly repositioning the airplane with the control wheel, rudder pedals and throttle. You had to do all of these with two hands and two feet, without the benefit of boosted flight controls or help from your co-pilot. When I would occasionally let the co-pilot have the controls, he would either get so close to the leader, we would be in his prop wash or so far out of formation the squadron leader would be screaming for us to get back. To put this into perspective imagine, if you will, the energy required to move the rudder the size of a billboard against air pressure generated by flying at a speed of 155 m.p.h. and without the aid of power boost. The ailerons were easier to move, but still required several pounds of leverage from my left arm (my weak arm).

By the time we would land after a 10 or 12 hour mission (my shortest was eight hours five minutes to Nancy, France), my legs would be so tired and cold I could hardly control the shaking and it took a great amount of effort and will to use the brakes and rudder to taxi to the parking area. God, what I would have given to have had a co-pilot that could at least taxi the airplane.

Because of this fatigue, after the debriefing of the mission described above, I asked one of the flight surgeons who was always at the debriefing what I could do to bounce back physically after the flight. The surgeon took me to the base hospital and told the orderly to strip me and rub me with cinnamon oil and put me under heat lamps. The orderly awakened me at nine p.m. and drove me to my quarters where I went to bed immediately. I would awaken refreshed. Come to think of it, maybe the scotch helped too. In any case, this therapy was used after each mission.

I will not try to describe all of my missions (there were 13 regular and four diversionary) for some of them do not stand out in my memory although each one was as terrifying as the other. I will, however, commit to paper those missions that were especially trying and I recall each detail vividly.

CHAPTER EIGHT Mount ‘N Ride

The crew finally decided on "Mount ‘N Ride", which would become prophetic

After the previous mission on which our airplane was destroyed, we were assigned another B17G that had just arrived from the states. Since it was to be a permanent assignment, my co-pilot and I moved the airplane to our dispersal area (located on Rudyard Kipling’s estate grounds) and turned it over to our crew chief. I do not remember the chief's name, but remember he was dedicated and good. He and his crew could replace an engine overnight under bitterly cold conditions. He never failed to have the airplane ready when we needed it. I am sure he" and his men grieved when we did not return from our last mission.

As was the custom in the 8th Air Force, the crew would name the airplane and an artist would paint an appropriate picture on each side of the nose. I told my enlisted men they could name the ship and they agonized over it for days. They finally decided on "Mount ‘N Ride", which would become prophetic. The artist painted a scantily clad girl resting on her shoulders with her rear-end pointed skyward. The picture was so suggestive that when we made an emergency landing on an RAF base, their operations officer ordered the picture covered with a sheet. What an insult!

Our first mission with "Mount ‘N Ride" was significant only because it did not happen. I do not recall the date or target, but remember that we loaded our gear, guns and bombs and when the flare went up we started the long, slow taxi to the take off runway. There was never any radio communications before and during taxiing and take off, because we did not want the Germans to know there was a mission in progress. Consequently, everything was done with flares. A white flare for taxi, green flare for take off and a red flare stopped everything. This mission was planned and briefed very carefully for we had a very important observer at our base that day, General Carl Spatz, the Commanding General of the Eighth Air Force.

Just after starting my take off run, the airplane started to pull to the right and I could not maintain directional control, so I braked to a stop and had the engineer fire a red flare. Everything came to a screeching halt. A jeep came screaming up and I was asked through my opened side window why the hell I stopped? After being told about the control problem, the operation officer checked the right side. He told me I had a flat tire and to get the damned thing off the runway. I told him I could not taxi with the flat. His instructions were quite explicit - get all four engines running, give it full throttle and run it off the runway. We followed instructions and when the flat tire hit the mud, it sank so deep we could not budge the airplane and we were still blocking the runway. The crew had left the airplane and was awaiting transportation back to the flight line when a staff car and a couple of trucks filled with soldiers drove up. General Spatz and the wing commander were in the staff car and they immediately took charge of digging the airplane out of the mud. Can you imagine a Commanding General with a shovel showing off? It happened. After a few minutes, they realized it was hopeless so the operation officer drove by each airplane motioning them to turn around and taxi the other way. They made the take off from the other end of the runway and were just barely clearing my airplane.

I was told later that forming into the group was a real fiasco, because most of the planes took off in reverse order.

A few days after the aborted mission, we were awakened at 3:00 a.m. to get ready for a pre-dawn take off. This is probably a good time in this narrative to describe the mission briefing for the officers and ground preparation for each flight. The group commander would announce the target and explain the importance of the mission. It might be a ball bearing factory of fuel dumps or an aircraft factory or any of a number of war industries. The group operations officer would cover the details of engine start, taxiing, take off and the position each crew would be flying in the formation. The intelligence officer would take over and point out the route we would be flying on a large map of Europe. He would also tell us where we would pick up our fighter escorts, which were usually P47's and British Spitfires early in the mission and as we got deeper into Europe, we would be covered by P38's then the PSI's would take us to the target. The order of coverage was dictated by the fuel range of the fighters. We always booed when we were told we would have British cover, because when you cried bandit (enemy aircraft) they would say "sorry old chap, we cannot fight at that altitude."

As an aside, the British did their bombing at night and after we had reported a few times that over the same target the next day we would not see any smoke or fires they started requiring strike messages by radio, so they could triangulate and determine if they were over the target. Since they flew in single file, a lot of them were flying out over the North Sea, dropping their bombs and circling until time to go home.

Just as we booed British cover, we cheered when we were told where the B24's would be passing us (they were faster). The B24 was not designed originally for high altitude flying and with the thick, narrow chorded Davis wing they could not fly good formation and were sitting ducks for the Luftwaffe.

Having the 24's beside us always took the pressure off of our wing. The intelligence officer would also show on the map where the diversion raid would be going that day, which was designated to take pressure off the main force. Finally, the intelligence officer would tell us where to expect enemy fighter intercept and the location of the known anti aircraft batteries.

The final briefing would be by the group meteorologist. Since it would be late February before we had the radar equipped path finder airplanes that would allow us to bomb targets obscured by clouds, the briefing for the weather at the target was very important. We were also briefed on what to expect locally upon return that evening.

The last thing at the briefing was the synchronization of our watches. The operations officer would say in 15 seconds it will be 04: 30 hours - hack! I never understood this, because we never had occasion on a mission to look at our watches.

The target on this day for our wing was Hamburg. Some of the other wings would bomb Kiel just north of Hamburg. This was to be the 25th and last mission for our squadron commander before rotating home, and in honor of the occasion, he would be the group and wing leader. Since we were bombing Northern Germany seaports, our flight path would take us out over the North Sea for much of the mission with landfall being only a few miles from the target, so the mission should have been an easy one.

About one and a half hours out of England, we were contacted by radio and told that the

scout plane had just been over the targets and they were both obscured by clouds and that we were to proceed to our alternate target, Düsseldorf. This change in targets meant that we would be over enemy territory longer and we would be in range of the feared Abbeville kids out of Belgium. The Abbeville kids, incidentally, were a crack Luftwaffe Team that had more aces than any other German Air Force group. They always caught us when our aircraft were still heavy with bombs and fuel and just getting into the routine of the mission. It was also when we had our weakest fighter cover.

As we approached the target, we took a direct hit in our number 3 engine (right inboard engine), and we lost oil pressure so fast that we could not feather the propeller and immediately had a runaway prop. We knew that we would be unable to stay with the formation because the only way I could control the prop was to slow the airplane to a speed at which I could partially stall out the blades of the propeller. This speed was just above the stalling speed of the airplane.

We immediately aborted the mission and began the long, slow descent home. In this situation where you were a sitting duck, you would like to have the throttles to the firewall and the air speed at the red line, but we were trying our best to hold the air speed at 115 or 120 m.p.h. During the descent, I told the bombardier to look for a target and drop the bombs. Our navigator, who was the best, gave us a direct course to the closest air base in England.

Before leaving the Dutch Coast, I explained to the crew that we would probably lose the propeller somewhere over the North Sea and the odds were good that it would come through the cockpit and down the airplane. I gave them the option of bailing out and becoming P.O.Wls or staying with me and try to get home. They voted to stay with the plane.

The flight across the North Sea was touch and go. We had descended to an altitude just above the ocean and there were times we would actually get water on the windshield from spray off the 20 foot waves. I believed that at this altitude a German fighter could not attack us and felt that the heavier the air the slower the stalling speed would be and I could better control the prop. I also felt that the lighter the plane the lower the stalling speed so I had the crew throw overboard everything they could get loose. Only the bombsight and Bunin's chair was off limits. How a 21 year old kid could figure that all out and handle a situation like this, I will never know. When we descended to this altitude, we introduced another element of danger. At this altitude we were flying in and out of low flying scud clouds, which restricted our visibility (not much fun at 25 foot altitude), and we were picking up ice in the clouds, which would effect my stalling speed. Fortunately, in the B17, we had an open able 6" wide window on the outboard side of the windshield and because of the contour of the windshield when the window was opened, you actually had a suction rather than wind coming in the window. Anyway, after I opened the window, I did not have to worry about the ice on the windshield.

I cannot recall how many hours it took to cross the North Sea at our slow speed, but can assure you it felt like it was forever. During the entire crossing, my radio operator was in contact with the British Air Sea Rescue. About every half hour, Bunin would press down his telegraph key sending out a constant radio signal that would be monitored by several ground stations who would in turn pinpoint our position by directional radio triangulation. They would give us our position and the navigator would give me a corrected heading to the airfield. We knew, of course, that should we go down in the water, there was a 99% chance we could not live long enough to be rescued. We were

told that 30 seconds in the frigid North Sea was about the limit.

We finally made land fall exactly where the navigator said we would and we landed immediately - after all, we only had to let down another 25 feet to hit the runway.

In inspecting the number three engine, we found that all of the nuts holding the nose section on the engine were gone except for two which had about an inch to go before they left the engine. Probably another five minutes and we would have lost the entire nose section.

Our base was notified that we were safely down long after the other aircraft had returned home. The duty officer told us to expect ground transportation home around one a.m. and that our crew chief and his crew would depart immediately with a new engine and prop to recover the airplane.

Except for covering up our picture on the nose, the RAF officers were excellent hosts. They gave us plenty to drink and a good meal. Around one a.m., a G.I. truck pulled up to transport us back to the base, which was a good four or five hour drive. Being the aircraft commander and ranking officer - I was a First Lieutenant, they were Second Lieutenants - I pulled rank and rode up front with the heater and they rode on the benches in the back. Fortunately, the duty officer was thoughtful enough to throw in several army blankets to keep the crew warm.

The trip lasted the rest of the night and we did not reach the base until well after daylight. The truck driver dropped the co-pilot and myself off at our house and we went to bed immediately. After we woke up, the first thing I noticed was that my eggs and fruit were gone from my dresser and then I noticed all my clothes were gone. After the other pilots in the house were told that we had left the formation with a mechanical problem and were assumed lost, they took all of our possessions. Everything but the eggs and fruit was returned before the end of the day.

Just to give you a little glimpse at how we lived at Bassingbourn. The pilots all lived in base houses that had been the quarters for married officers when the base was occupied by the RAF before the war. The pilots in our squadron shared the home that had been the base commanders quarters. It was a quite large three story brick house with a kitchen and library. My co-pilot and I shared a room on the second floor. Our bedroom had a coal burning fireplace on the end wall between our beds. Fireplaces were the only heat in the house. Mercereau and I took turns putting coal in the fireplace. When it was my turn, I would get up off the bed and throw in several chunks of coal. When it was his turn, he would pitch one lump out of the kettle and toss it in the fireplace.

Mercereau was a typical New Yorker, a know it all. His dad, whom I met on my return to the states, was the President of U.S. Sugar Company. Anyway, one day I lost my patience when he tossed his one lump of coal in the fireplace and I told him that from then on he was going to get up and stoke the fire just as I did and that was an order. He then went into a long dissertation about the fact you would get as many BTU of heat from one lump of coal put in often as a bunch of coals put in at greater intervals. He was probably right. My comment was, "If you're so damn smart, tell me why baloney curls up when you fry it?" You know he knew. He said it was simple, since the outer part of the slice has more surface the moisture dissipates faster than the smaller inner part of the slice which causes it to curl.

There were three orderlies assigned to our house who made the beds, did the laundry, shined the shoes and cleaned the wool clothing. His cleaning fluid was gasoline so you always had that smell.

Obviously, we could not fly everyday because of weather and the human body and mind just could not take it everyday, so we had to find things to do to kill time. We spent a lot of time at the officers club, which was in the BOQ where our navigator and bombardier lived. I never really learned to like that heavy English beer, but I drank it anyway. We played a lot of poker and I guess over time I ended up about even. We also shot a lot of pool.

Once in a while, we would ride the train 60 miles into London and spend the weekend. There was an officers billet in London where we could stay without paying. I remember on one of our trips we were in the bar in one of the hotels having a drink when the air raid sirens wentoff. We immediately scrambled out onto the street to see the action. Search lights were stabbing the sky, anti aircraft guns were firing and we could hear the British Mosquito Bombers overhead intercepting the German aircraft. It was like a Fourth of July fireworks display. After a few minutes a Bobby came by and said you bloody stupid Yanks do not have enough sense to stay inside during an air raid. About that time, a big blob of anti aircraft shell debris fell right in front of us. You can bet we got back inside.

Back to the action. I reported that the previous mission was the last for Lieutenant Colonel Bishop, our squadron commander, and unfortunately we missed the celebration since we did not make it home that night. Colonel Bishop was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Berry, a West Point graduate. It was my understanding that he had served as cadet commandant at a pre-flight school and had recently completed B17 transition, but had not gone through RTC training. It was obvious from the first day that he could not get the cadet experience out of his mind.

His first edict was that he had noticed that the enlisted airmen were sloppy and did not salute their officers and he wanted them cleaned up and wanted them to act like soldiers.

Although we had link instrument trainers, Colonel Bishop never scheduled his pilots to use them since we were flying instruments almost everyday and without radio navigation systems we did not need to practice that. Colonel Berry had not been there more than a few days when he posted a link trainer schedule on the bulletin board. Alphabetically, I was right at the top of the list. My immediate reaction was - to hell with it - and did not go as scheduled. The next day I was summoned to the Colonels office and lectured about insubordination, team play, and dedication to duty. He then ordered me to get my parachute and do two tours up and down in front of operations. Being cocky and not too smart, I reminded the Colonel that he could not order the punishment of an officer in front of his enlisted men and that all he could do was court martial me for missing a schedule or confine me to quarters. He confined me for a week.

From this day forward, I would always be assigned to the coffin corner of the squadron formation. The coffin corner position was the outer wing position of the rear echelon of the formation. You not only had to work harder out there to fly formation, but that was always the first ship the Germans went after, because a lot fewer of the guns could be trained on the fighter as it came in.

A couple more comments about Colonel Berry and I will move on to more important things.

On one of the missions, I do not recall which, Berry was leading the wing and made a mistake a good leader never makes, he led the wing right into the clouds when it could have been avoided. Can you imagine the confusion and fear?

I ran into Colonel Berry in Tokyo during the Korean War. He was a full Colonel serving as a liaison officer for GHQ Intelligence - a nothing position. Had he been a real good West Point officer, he would have been at least a Major General by the time I saw him.

We were not aware at the time, of course, but planning for the invasion of Europe was well along in January of 1944. By early February, the Eighth Air Force was flying 1,000 sorties each day weather permitted.

In early February General Doolittle, who had bombed Tokyo, took command of the Eighth Air Force. One of his first official acts was a visit to the 91st Bomb Group where he made a speech that made the hair on the back of my neck stand up.

"Gentlemen, our purpose for being here is to defeat the Germans. To do this we must destroy their heavy industries and their Air Force. You men have been trained for and assigned the task of doing this. The very nature of your assignment makes you an expendable asset of your country. From now on we will not only announce in advance our mission, but will tell them the target. The purpose of this is to get them to commit everyone of their aircraft to stopping each mission. If they put the aircraft up we can destroy them."

I do not have to tell you that to be told you are
expendable is rather scary.

On our mission to Ludwigshaven, the Abbeville kids in their black and white checker board MEI091s attacked us and we were attacked by two more fighter groups before we reached the target. Our P47's, P38's and PSI's were having a field day with the German fighters. I could not watch but my copilot told me they were going down all around us. I was later told that the kids flying the German fighters had only between 50 and 100 hours flying time.

Even though our fighters were doing a great job, we were still getting hit and losing airplanes. We took a hit in our number two engine. When Ilooked out, Icould see a hole melting in the cowling and could see a piston moving up and down without a cylinder around it. Immediately after the hit, we feathered the engine, shut off the fuel and shut the engine down. We were near the target when this happened so we continued the bomb run even thought we were already falling behind.

The thing you always feared flying in combat was losing an engine and being unable to stay in formation. This was the second time it happened to us and would happen again. When you are out there all by yourself without the benefit of the fire power of your buddies, you're a sitting duck. The enemy can knock you off at their leisure and without much danger to themselves, kind of like a wounded duck. On this mission we were lucky, there were no fighters after we left the target.

Because of our lack of speed, we were unable to stay with our group, so we gradually fell back. It was my plan to keep as close as I could to each of the groups following as I fell further behind. What I did not know was that when I tried to fall into the group behind they would try to

shoot us down. I was aware, of course, that at some time in the past, a German crew flew into a formation with a captured Bl7 and shot down some planes, but did not think of it at the time. When I realized we were on our own, I hit the deck and headed home.

We had no further problem reaching England. However, due to our slow speed and late arrival, the weather had deteriorated to a point we could not find our runway. There were no radio homing beacons for us to use, because they did not want the Germans to be able to home in on a base and either hit us in a landing pattern or bomb our airplanes on the ground. Because of this lack of a beacon, our only chance of finding the airfield and runway was to have the radio operator work with the ground stations so they could pinpoint our position and our navigator could give us a steer to the airport.

Twice they got us to the airfield and we made a let down to minimum altitude without making visual contact with the runway. After the second pass, the tower broke radio silence and told us that they had heard us go over the field. They also reported a ceiling of 300 ft. However, very heavy rain was restricting visibility to about a hundred yards. We told the tower we were low on fuel and we had to do something quick, either climb up and head the airplane out to the Channel and bailout or find a field somewhere. After contacting the operation officer, the tower told us to try one more approach and if we could not land to head for the English Channel and ditch the airplane.

They would alert Air Sea Rescue and have them standing by. On our third approach, when I was about to give up, there was a miraculous pause in the rain and I could see the runway, so I did some erratic maneuvering to get lined up and then landed. God was our co-pilot this day. When we finally landed and taxied by the ramp, there were probably fifty of our fellow airman lined up watching us and applauding.

There were two things the flight crew did always. Each night before going to bed you checked the sky hoping for bad weather, so you would not have to fly the next day. The other was if you were not on the mission, you went to the flight line to count the returning planes and to watch for the red flares that would let the ground crews know there was injured or dead airmen aboard.

On January 29, 1944, we received the chilling word that our target for the day was Frankfort, Germany. It would be a 10 hour mission, which would have us over enemy territory for seven hours. We would again be passing through the territory protected by the Abbeville kids and would over fly the home bases of three more fighter wings.

Frankfort was one of three industrial cities clustered together on the Rhine River and were the most heavily defended with anti aircraft batteries of any cities in Germany. On the previous mission to this target, the Eighth Air Force lost 55 airplanes and a great number of those losses were to flak. Although we had passed near Frankfort on our previous raid on Ludwigshaven 40 miles to the south, we did not go through what was known as Flak Valley.

As was usual, we were intercepted by the checker board airplanes soon after crossing the Dutch Coast and the ME 109's were heavily engaged by our P47's and were sustaining heavy. losses. It seemed that on each mission there would be fewer Abbeville kids there to greet us.

Our briefing officer told us to expect heavy fighter activity near Aachen, Germany, because intelligence had learned that two new fighter wings had been moved from deep in Germany to two

airfields located in this area. . As predicted, we were intercepted by one of the wings while we were still over Holland and the second wing about 60 or 70 miles short of the target. By the time the second wave hit us, we were being covered by P38's and P51's.

We were under fighter attack for at least an hour and a half before reaching the target area and they were taking their toll on our wing and those wings following us. The enemy was also taking losses both from our fighters and the Bl7 gunners. We were credited with two kills.

Fortunately, my airplane took only a moderate amount of damage and would be patched up and ready to fly within a week. Our group had its heaviest losses since the Schwienfort raid, losing eleven aircraft.

If you noticed, this is the only mission I dated exactly and the reason for this was that this was the mission on which your Uncle Tommy Price was killed.

It was on this mission that a crippled P38 stuck his wing tip in my right waist gunners window and stayed there until we reached the coast on our way back. Obviously, he was in no position to protect himself and needed our help. I guess turn about is fair play.

In late February, our target was Leipzig, Germany, the deepest penetration in Germany to that date. For this mission, we put up nine aircraft in our squadron and furnished some crews for the composite squadron. We took our usual position in coffin corner in the third echelon. On this date, coffin corner was the right wing of the third echelon of the high starboard squadron.

It was standard procedure if you lost your squadron leader for the leader of the second echelon to take the lead. If he was lost, then the leader of the third echelon became the leader, then if he was lost the wing man took over. My position would be the last to take the lead.

We were repeatedly attacked beginning shortly after crossing the Belgium Coast. The first attackers were the Abbeville Kids. We lost our squadron leader soon after the attacks began and by the time we reached the target, we had lost eight of our nine crews. I was the only one left and since I had no one to form on my lead, I could ad lib the rest of the mission. Rest assured, for the rest of the mission I always had one or more airplanes between me and the attackers. I would go up on top and then down under. I would go to the right and then to the left, wherever I needed to be to be safe. In my previous 10 missions, I saw many of our airplanes going down, but nothing in my memory could compare to this mission. It was a slaughter. To see so many airplanes, some your friends, spinning out of control with a wing or tail missing and to see them on their back and see balls of fire when they exploded shall remain in my memory for the rest of my life.

The debriefing that night was a somber affair. From a normal compliment of sixteen crews, we were down to eight. Since we were the only returning crew from our main squadron, the flight surgeon told us he was going to order us to the nut house, called Flak House, for a couple of weeks rest. All of the crew agreed that we should stay at the squadron and try to get in the rest of our 25 missions and go home.

The next to last mission for us was the first Berlin raid and would be our deepest penetration

into enemy territory. It would put us at the very limit of our oxygen and fuel supplies. The mission for our group went fairly well, and we only had a couple of losses to the enemy. However, a few ran out of fuel and had to ditch in the Channel. The crews would be picked up and returned to base.

Since we are talking fuel and oxygen, let me digress for a minute and discuss them. Two things were uppermost in my mind when preparing for and flying a mission. First was fuel. I always asked for a full load even though it would make the take off a little hazardous, and contrary to the flight manual instructions, immediately after take off, I would put the fuel mixture controls in automatic lean to save fuel and pray the engine's temperatures would not go beyond the. red line. I found I could get away with this on the Curtis Wright engine, but I would destroy the engine made by Studebaker. They should have stuck to cars. After the crew chief found out what I was doing, he never accepted another Studebaker engine.

The other great concern was that of bringing home a dead crew member that died from a lack of oxygen. I was always prepared to immediately get to a lower altitude if we were running short of oxygen even if it made us more vulnerable to attack, but the thing that concerned me most was that a crew member would inadvertently disconnect his hose or sever it or get a crimp in it and we would not know.

One of the things they demonstrate to you in the high altitude chamber is what happens when you are disconnected from oxygen at altitude. You become euphoric and would die happy and quickly. Because of this fear, I assigned the bombardier the responsibility of calling each crew member on unicom every few minutes to make sure they were okay. On one of the missions, he lost contact with Brandt in the tail gunner position. I immediately told Okie to grab a walk around oxygen bottle and check on him. Getting into the tail was tough even without a walk around bottle, since you had to crawl around the tail wheel strut but Okie made it. When Okie got back to his position, he called me and said. "The dumb son-of-bitch was sitting there with his ear phones unplugged just looking around. I got his attention by hitting him on the side of the head with the oxygen bottle. I tried to kill him."

CHAPTER NINE The Last Mission

The mission was on the 16th of March 1944, just four and a half months after leaving the states

The 13th and last mission would result in my crew and I embarking on a new adventure. The mission was on the 16th of March 1944, just four and a half months after leaving the states, the target was Augsburg in southern Germany. It was another. of those missions where the Luftwaffe would begin attacking as soon as we crossed the French Coast. However, our wing had very little action until we were well inside Germany. When we were approaching the target area, we were jumped by a new wave of German fighters and on their first pass, we lost our number three engine and we managed to feather the prop. With the loss of the engine, we started to fall behind and became a sitting duck for the fighters. They could circle you like a lion after an antelope and knock you off whenever they felt like it. After they hit the main group again, one of the FW190' s headed for us. Even though my gunners were on continuous fire, the plane made it through and took our number two engine. I immediately dove for the cloud deck several thousand feet below, hoping we would get there before we were hit again. Just after we started our dive, three P38's seeing our difficulty, carne charging towards us and gave us air cover until we reached the clouds. In the meantime, since it was obvious that we could not make it back to England, I asked the navigator to give us a heading to the nearest airfield in Switzerland.

My pilot sons will appreciate this part of the narrative. The gyroscopic flight instruments that are used to maintain aircraft attitude and direction were driven by vacuum pumps on engine two and three. Since we had lost those engines, the attitude instruments were inoperative, so I found myself flying the airplane on needle ball and airspeed as I had learned to do back in basic. Not an easy feat and trying to maintain a heading with a bouncing compass isn't too easy either.

After we entered the clouds, another element of danger besides the loss of instruments was introduced. The navigator had given us a heading to Dubendorf, Switzerland, which would be the closest airfield and we knew we would be entering a mountainous country. What we did not know was the height of the base of the clouds and it could very well be we would hit a mountain before breaking out of the clouds. God was with us as he had been from the beginning, and we broke out of the clouds over Lake Constance and would reach our destination within a few minutes.

We were to have one more panicky situation before we landed. The co-pilot had not destroyed all of our secret documents while we were letting down and was in the process of finishing the job when I called for landing gear and flaps. The delay caused us to overshoot the runway and we had to make a go around with only two engines for power. It was impossible to gain altitude, so we had to fly around some hills to get back to the airport.

As soon as we came to a stop, the airplane was surrounded by soldiers shouting at us in German. One of the soldiers came aboard with the bayonet attached to his rifle and began jabbing the crew members to get them out of the plane. My first thought was that the navigator had made a mistake and we had landed in Germany. The incident with the soldier and the interrogation late into the night was the only harassment we had from the Swiss during our stay there.

CHAPTER TEN Switzerland

Adelboden was an idyllic valley with several hotels ... and quaint Chalets

We spent the night in a small hotel in Dubendorf and left by train early the next morning for the capital city, Bern. We were escorted on this trip by Swiss soldiers. Upon arriving in Bern, we were taken to the entrance to a cable car, which would transport us to the top of the mountain overlooking the city. The first evening here we learned what a restricted diet we would be on for the rest of our stay. In the dining room, we were able to buy liquor and beer. It seemed that the only whiskey in Switzerland was Vat 69 Scotch, which I did not like, but drank anyway. There were already four other American crews at the hotel when we arrived and when we got to the dining room they were having a beer fight. The beer bottles in Switzerland had porcelain tops held down by wire like the ones used in the states in the early 30's. The boys had discovered that they could shake the beer and pop the top with their thumbs and shoot the beer clear across the dining room. The Swiss waiters were most unhappy, since they had to clean up the mess.

There was still a lot of snow on the ground, so we rented skis and boots and started taking skiing lessons. We would ski every day for the two weeks we were at this hotel and by the time we left we considered ourselves experts at it. It was also here .where Bunin started teaching me to play chess. However, I would never get good enough to beat him on a regular basis.

Finally, we were moved to Adelboden, a ski resort high in the Alps that had catered to the British tourists before the war. Adelboden was an idyllic valley with several hotels for the tourists and quaint Chalets for the local residents. It was the German speaking area of Switzerland.

The only way in and out of the village was across a long bridge spanning a deep gorge. The bridge was guarded 24 hours a day by Swiss soldiers, and while we had the run of the village, the steep mountains behind us and the bridge made us prisoners.

When we arrived in Adelboden, there were about one hundred British soldiers who had made their way all the way across France from Dunkirk. There were also about 50 Yugoslavians and a few Canadian Air Force officers. The British and Yugoslavians were in hotels at one end of the village and we were at the other end. We never got along and after awhile, the Canadians moved down with us, because they could not get along with the British either.

There were only a handful of Americans in the camp and they were billeted in the Palace Hotel. Within a short time, we filled two hotels. The air war was at its zenith and more and more crippled aircraft made their way into the country. As we grew in numbers, we segregated the officers in the Palace Hotel and the enlisted men in the National Hotel.

Soon after we settled in, we were visited by a Colonel Free who was the military attache at the Embassy in Bern. The purpose of the visit was to make sure we were properly cared for and to let us know the rules of our internment and to give us money to purchase our day to day requirements which would be deducted from our pay when we returned to the states. For some unknown reason, Colonel Free asked me to be the liaison with the Embassy, and that I would sign a parole stating I would not escape, which would give me the run of the country, and from then on, I would be called to make several trips to Bern and to Geneva.

It was obvious to me from the earliest days in Adelboden that the troops would become

bored, because there was so little to do and bored troops make mischief. I asked Colonel Free on my first trip to the Embassy if we had any discretionary funds that could be used to purchase athletic equipment and I told him of my plan to open school offering college level courses. He said there were funds available to do anything we wanted to do to help the troops fill their days. He also suggested that I go to Geneva and meet with the Red Cross to determine what help they could be to us, which I did the next day.

The Red Cross offered little help other than to say that they would be delivering packages from our relatives in the states should any get through. They did suggest that I get in touch with a Mr. Lowery, who was the European Secretary for the YMCA. This became a very important relationship for me and for the men. Mr. Lowery could arrange for almost anything, including a good black market meal.

My first day with Lowery, he asked me to have dinner with him and we could discuss what needed to be done. He took me to a small restaurant in some alley (I never found it again) and when we ordered drinks I followed his lead and ordered my first martini - ugh! When I found out we were having steak with mushrooms I almost started salivating like a dog. You cannot imagine what a treat this was for me. We discussed the school, athletic equipment and movies and he agreed to make all the arrangements. Since there was nothing more for me to do in Geneva, I returned to the camp and its routine.

Switzerland, a small mountainous country, could not begin to raise enough food to feed itself and most of the food that was indigenous to Switzerland was milk products such as cheese. Because of this lack of production, the Swiss had to depend upon imported foods that had to come either through Germany or German occupied countries. What was actually imported I have no way of knowing. However, I do remember what eventually reached our dining room. Not much!

Breakfast was usually a kind of gruel that you could put milk on or black bread and cheese or on rare occasions some little German sausages. Lunch could be some strange cold cuts, meatless soup, some unrecognizable casserole or once in awhile black bread and cheese. Dinner was almost always rotten fish, or tripe stew. Sometimes I could manage the fish but could never bring myself to eat the stomach linings of a cow.

As you can imagine, our thoughts were on food most of the time. Each morning Bunin, Okie, Brandt, Trendell and I would walk the length of the village main street to the Victoria Hotel and order hard rolls, butter, and cherry jam. We would count out the little swirls of butter and the cherries in the jam and if there was an extra, we flipped a coin for it. In the evening, I would usually make the trek back to the Victoria and eat spaghetti with tomato sauce and drink beer.

Two of the foods I missed most were bacon and eggs. We had very few eggs in Britain and absolutely none here and no bacon either place. One day Ruth, the daughter of the hotel owner who had become a great friend of my crew, told us that they would be getting some eggs for baking in a few days and she would save five for us. On the day they arrived, I was busy with the duties of camp commander, a duty I had assumed earlier, and could not go for breakfast that morning. When I finally did go to the Victoria, Ruth told me that Trendell had told her that I said he could have my egg since I was going to Geneva. I wonder if I would have been tried. For murder had I killed him?

Earlier, as the village was filling up with Americans, it was decided to move the officers to

Davos Platz, the plush resort frequented by royalty, and open another enlisted camp in the village of Wengen. Trendell and I chose to remain in Adelboden with our enlisted men and I was assigned as camp commandant. As I mentioned earlier, Merletti was an outstanding trumpet player and had organized a dance band so it was decided that he and his band would go with the officers. It was in Davos that Merletti met and later married his wife. Modell and Peterson chose to go to Wengen. This left Bunin, Ok ie, Brandt, Trendell and myself in Adelboden.

As time passed, the days ran together and we had all sunk into a funk. Early on, there was still a lot of snow on the Wilstruble Mountains, which reached more than eleven thousand feet behind us. We would take the cable car to the first level of the mountain then lifts up to the slopes and ski. Many times I heard from the Swiss that "You crazy Americans do not know enough to ski across the slopes, you have to go straight down the slope out of control and someday break you legs and head."

After the snow melted on the ski slopes, we would still go to the mountain just to enjoy the scenery and the great bread, cheese, and wine at the little Chalet at the top of the cable car run. On one occasion, I climbed to the top of the Wilstruble with five Yugoslavians who were experienced mountain climbers. One of the Slavs, the one who talked me into this crazy experience, spoke English.

In order to get a start at daylight, the evening before the climb, we went to the Chalet at the top of the cable car to spend the night. The croats had very little money so I bought the dinner and wine. We slept on a board ledge under the Chalet with a small pad under us and a comforter to keep warm.

After some bread and cheese, we started out at daylight to cross the meadow to begin our climb to the top. This was not a really hazardous climb as are some of the mountains, since we did not have to scale any sheer cliffs, but the climb was tiring and a more dangerous situation than I liked to be in. As a matter of fact, I was scared to death.

During the long climb, we encountered the mountain goats who could, if panicked, run you right off the paths. We also stopped for lunch at a small cabin, which was stocked with canned goods for the climbers. There were a number of rings fastened to the rocks and even long bolts driven into the rocks for steps to help the neophyte climber. When the climbing became hazardous, we tied ourselves together, three to a rope, for protection. Because of my lack of experience, I was placed between the English speaking Croat and one of the others. As we approached the top, we had to transverse a centuries old glacier. The crossing was difficult and there were many fissures to worry about. You could look down hundreds of feet into these openings in the ice and see colors from aqua marine blue to jade green.

When we reached the top, I felt a great sense of relief, which was to be short lived. The view from the peak was breathtaking. You looked across ridge after ridge of the Alps and had the feeling you could almost see the Mediterranean. We signed the book that was in a water-proof box and began our descent, so we could reach the base before dark. The descent was even more difficult and tiring than the climb, because you had more tendency to slip and slide. Also, we were using a different set of muscles which was tiring. Anyway, we reached the cable car before it stopped running for the night and made it back to our own bed. A wonderful experience, but never again.

Mr. Lowery had arranged for three professors from the University of Geneva to spend the summer with us, and we organized several classes including math, political geography, and European History. We even had classes for the illiterate, using our own people as instructors one on one. I was quite surprised to find out that there were several illiterate sergeants that had gone through gunnery school. The classes being taught by the professors started out full, but the men began losing interest and by the end of summer, the classes were pretty small.

One of the teachers was a Frenchman by the name of Prior. He was a cherub of a man that was delightful to be around. We drunk a lot of beers together during the summer and I hated to see him go back to the university. On Professor Prior's last night in Adelboden, my crew and I took him to dinner at the Victoria. About midnight, after dinner and many, many drinks, we all locked arms and staggered our way the length of the main street with Prior singing the French National Anthem at the top of his voice. Some locals became very angry.

Mr. Lowery also arranged for some old 35 millimeter movies and an old, old theater projector. The projector had sound but you had to hand crank it to run the film. As the operator started getting tired the film would slow and the sound would slow and get lower in tone. A pretty sorry way to see a movie, but better than nothing. It did kill time.

As you can imagine, being together seven days a week and sharing sleeping quarters does not make for happy relations. I shared a room with Trendell and Okie and Bunin shared the room next to us with a connecting door. I finally kicked Trendell out, because I could not stand him anymore and was close to moving Bunin. Bunin had this habit of imitating Donald Duck that drove Okie and me crazy. We learned that playing cards made the days go faster and eased tension among ourselves. So many times we played pinochle through the night.

Early in our internment, several of us bought cameras that we used to record our stay in Adelboden. I purchased a Zeiss Icon folding camera that used 120 film and it took beautiful pictures. Bunin bought a Rolleflex and was still using it when he died. About the middle of the summer, we were notified that we would have to turn in our cameras to the Embassy. Why, we were never told, there were certainly no mili tary secrets where we were. When we turned in the cameras, they were wrapped and marked with our name and we were given a receipt. When I received my package after the war, it contained a cheap Voiklander rather than my expensive Zeiss Icon. Obviously, some clerk in the embassy switched cameras.

When I was appointed camp commandant, I became acquainted with Captain Bohnhauser, the Swiss Army Officer who was in charge of the soldiers who guarded our camp. Bohnhauser and I were to become good friends during the months I was there and this friendship would help when I escaped.

In the evening in Adelboden, the sounds of the Alpine horns would echo through the mountains. The horns were about 10 to 12 feet long and when being played the bell at the end rested on the ground. The horns had very deep and mellow sounds and when you are far from home, a mournful sound. I wanted very much to see one of these horns played, so I asked one of the Swiss merchants who played them and where? I was told that the herdsmen in the upper meadows were the ones who played and was given direction how to reach one of them. So the next day Okie, Bunin and I started climbing up the meadow south of our village. After a few hours, we arrived at a small hut at the edge of the meadow where the herdsman spent the summer. There was no one there at the time,

so we just made ourselves at home.

In early evening, the herdsman returned to the hut and in what little German we had learned, we tried to explain why we were there. Since we would be unable to go back down the mountain that day, he allowed us to stay the night and fed us the usual cheese and black bread. In this hut, there was a wood burning fireplace to take the chill off and big wooden vats in which the herdsman processed the milk from his herd into cheese. Just at dusk, he took his Alpine horn down from the rack on the wall and went to the edge of the cliff, pointed the horn at the village and began to play. You could hear the others from the same meadow and from meadows in the distance begin playing and with the echoing through the mountains, it sounded almost like an orchestra.

CHAPTER ELEVEN The Escape

I could make some arrangements to escape

As the summer faded and we went into fall, I became more and more homesick and more bored with the troops and the village, so I began to think about escaping. The news reports we were receiving, primarily from our Embassy, told us that the Invasion of Europe was going well and the allied troops were getting closer to Switzerland each day, so there would eventually be a way out if I could find it.

In early October, I had to make a trip to the Embassy in Bern and while there I asked Colonel Free if I could turn in my parole and have him hold it until I could make some arrangements to escape, then for him to date it and turn it in. He said he could and would. He also gave me a name and telephone number to contact for help in Geneva. Soon after returning to Adelboden I was having a drink with Captain Bohnhauser and he informed me that he would be taking a company of his guards to Bern on Sunday and would pick up their replacement and return to Adelboden on the following day. I said that is great, I have to go to Bern on Sunday and we could share a seat on the bus to Frutigen, then on the train into Bern. This was the opening that I needed, for I knew if we shared a seat on the bus, he would vouch for me to the guards at the bridge and I would not have to show them my parole.

The next morning, I went to the civilian in charge of the kitchen and dining room and ask him if he could arrange for a taxi from Frutigen to Geneva for me. If he could, I agreed to pay him $50.00. Incidentally, I had ask Colonel Free for a $500.00 advance on my pay to use for my escape. Within an hour, arrangements had been made for the taxi and I was told that I could recognize the cab by a white sheet of paper laying on the dash.

As Sunday approached, I began to get nervous for I knew that if caught I would be imprisoned for the rest of the war, but I was determined to go through with it.

On Saturday evening, I said my goodbyes to my crew and have to admit it was tearful for all of us. I packed what little I could carry without Bohnhauser being suspicious. I ended up with just a shaving kit and the watches I was taking home to my mother and daddy and your mother.

The bus was to leave at 09:00 a.m. Sunday morning and it would take an hour to reach Frutigen at the base of the mountain. I do not need to tell you that I was on time and in a window seat before Bohnhauser got aboard. He loaded his troops and seeing me he came back and took the aisle seat as I had hoped he would. When the bus stopped at the bridge and the sentry came aboard to check travel documents, Bohnhauser vouched for me and I was on my way.

When we reached the train station, the captain said he would form up his troops on the loading dock and make sure they got on the train then he would look for me. As soon as he turned the corner, I took off for the taxi.

I recognized the taxi by the sheet of white paper and got in. The driver wanted his $250.00 before we left the station and I obliged. However, what was going through my mind was that he could turn me in, keep the money and not have to make the long trip to Geneva. We went to Geneva.

Upon arriving in Geneva late in the evening, I went to the hotel at the train station, a hotel I had stayed in several times and would be recognized by the desk clerk and would not have to show travel documents. Early the next morning, I called the man whose name and number was given me by Colonel Free. I told the man who I was and what I wanted to do and he agreed to help. He told me that I might not be safe in the hotel once the word got out that I had revoked my parole and I should be prepared to move quickly. He told me how to get to his house and that I should upon any indication of trouble get out of the hotel and make my way to his home. He said if he was not there the maid would let me in.

I remained at the hotel for a couple of days and stayed pretty much to the room, except to go out and eat. On the third day while looking out the window, I saw the shadows of two soldiers on the roof of my hotel reflected on the wall across the alley. Of course, I do not know if they were there because of me, but I grabbed my small bag and took off for the man's home. As I left the hotel, two soldiers entered the lobby and I assumed they were looking for me.

As an aside, the man whose name I can no longer recall, was the European director of IBM and the price for his assistance was that I would call on Thomas Watson, Chairman of IBM and thank him when I reached New York. This I did.

After two or three days, I was told that the Americans were past Lyon, France and were within twenty miles of Geneva. I was told that in a few days, a hundred British soldiers were being exchanged for a like number of Germans. The soldiers train was to stop in Geneva and that I would be put on the train with them.

On the night before I was to board the train, I was taken to the central train station and placed in the wine cellar of the restaurant to await the train. I was given a British uniform to put on and told to be ready on a moments notice to leave the cellar.

I slept fitfully all night. The next morning, the restaurant manager came for me and told me the train was in and that a number of British soldiers had left the train and some were in the restaurant buying snacks. He instructed me to go out of the restaurant to the dock, turn to the left and go down about three box cars and to get in and sit in a corner. For what seemed like hours, but was really only a few minutes, I sat there waiting for the train to move. I could just imagine the person in charge counting noses and finding out he had one too many. Finally, the doors were closed and the train moved out of the station. From Geneva it is only a few miles to the French border where we stopped at a German check point. I was wondering what I would do if we had to show travel orders. However, we were stopped for only a few minutes and the train began moving again.

After some time, I do not recall how long, the train stopped in a small town southeast of Lyon. After coming to a stop, the door to the box car was opened. I could imagine all sorts of things, but was greatly relieved and elated when I saw an American officers cap with the Eagle on it sticking through the door. The hat belonged to a major who asked, "Are there any Americans aboard?" I was practically home. I was driven into Lyon and put up in a hotel on the shores of a small lake and was told that I would be flown to England the next day. The only thing I remember about the hotel was that it was staffed by German prisoners, and when you passed one in the hall he would put his back to the wall and scoot past you. I guess some of the American soldiers had been teaching them humility.

I was flown to England the next day and was returned to my unit, the 91st Bomb Group. Since I was now classified as Project R (Repatriated Prisoner) I could no longer fly in that combat zone. I was put through the usual formality of checking out of the squadron including a physical examination, which showed I was in good health, but only weighed 108 pounds. I picked up what clothes I had left and signed out and went back to London to await a flight home.

On October 30, 1944, I left England on a C54 , spent the night in the Azores and the next day flew on to Presque Isle, Maine where I arrived much older than my 22 years, and a lot wiser, exactly one year to the day after I had left New York for England.

CHAPTER TWELVE **Back in the USA**

I pointed to all my ribbons and asked, what do you think these are Boy Scout merit badges?

As you can guess, absolutely the first thing I did after arriving in the states was to go to the PX and eat two cheeseburgers and drink a malted milk - exactly what the flight surgeon told me not to do. I was sick all night. The next morning, even though I was still *ill* from the cheeseburgers, I had several slices of bacon and four eggs. I was also sick again.

The next afternoon, I boarded a train for Boston where I would go through several days of debriefing. I went to the dining car that evening for dinner and asked the black waiter if I could have a steak and his response was, "Buddy don't you know there's a war on?" I pointed to all my ribbons and asked, "What do you think these are Boy Scout merit badges?"

While in Boston, the Army Colonel who was debriefing me took me to the Harvard Club where I met the head of the OPA in Boston (the office of price administrations controlled all rationed items). When I told him I needed a car he said, "Come to the office in the morning and I will fix you up." When I got to his office, he gave me an authorization to buy a new car, a spare tire and enough gas coupons to get me to California.

The only new cars available were Nash 500' s that had or iginally been ordered for the F. B. I., but had been made available for sale. It was not a pretty car especially since it had no chrome (war you know!), but I bought it anyway and took off for New York where I would go through another debriefing. The car, incidentally, had chrome but it had been painted over and I removed the paint later with acetone.

From New York, I drove to St. Louis where your mother would meet me to drive home to Tulsa. After a leave in Tulsa, your mother and I drove to Santa Monica, California where we enjoyed a month of rest and recuperation in a plush tourist hotel. From Santa Monica, we drove back through Tulsa on our way to Lockbourne AAB in Columbus, Ohio where I was to become an instructor in Bl7 transition.

After arriving in Columbus, I convinced the base commander that I had been away from B17's too long to be an instructor and was transferred to Moultrie, Georgia, which was a basic flight school instructing in AT6's.

I had never flown an AT6 so I had to go through a 40 hour check out period to prepare me for instructing cadets. I learned real quick what it was like to be sitting in the back cockpit completely blind and depending on a cadet with 50 hours flying time to get you on the ground safely. I told the squadron commander if I was going to be killed in an airplane, I would just as soon do it in combat where I could be a hero. I spent the next couple of months just making test flights on airplanes that had had engine changes. .

My final station was Enid Army Air Base where we were instructing foreigners in B25's and instrument training in AT6's. I had asked to be transferred, because your mother was pregnant and I wanted to be near home when Dennis was born. As it .turned out I was separated from the service on

August 15, 1945, just about twenty days before Dennis was born. How was that for timing? Twenty more days and the government would have paid the doctor and hospital bills.

EPILOGUE

The 9lst. Bomb Group was nicknamed "The Ragged Irregulars". The Bomb Group was activated at Harding Field Louisiana on April 15, 1942 and was repositioned to Bassingbourn, England in October 1942, and remained active until June 1945. Several claims to fame were established while operating. These included suffering the highest losses of all 8th Air Force Bomb Groups, being the first group to attack a target in the Ruhr valley (Hamm, January 4, 1943) leading the first Schweinfort mission, being the first Bomb Group to complete 100 missions, and having the first 8th Air Force B17 crew to complete 25 missions (The Crew of Memphis Belle).

Of the forty-eight crews that left Alexandria, Louisiana for England forty-three crews were shot down. I have no way of knowing how many crew members survived.

The nose of our airplane showed 13 bombs representing the targets we had bombed. The targets were:

Bremen
Wilhelmshaven
Hamburg
Kiel
Hanover
Düsseldorf
Frankfort
Munich
Ludwigshaven
Nancy, France
Berlin
Leipzig
Augsburg

The only surviving crew members I am aware of are:

Pete Peterson living near Wichita Falls, Texas Mel Brandt of Evansville, Indiana
Bert Trendell of Syracuse, New York
Nick Merletti of Cheshire, Connecticut

Later Robert Mercereau was located in New York

Since, Doyle Bradford and Pete Peterson have joined the rest of the crew in the "Folded Wing Squadron."